

HONEST BLAGO ■ FDR'S CRASH COURSE ■ MCGOVERN BEATS NIXON

JANUARY 12, 2009

The American Conservative

Whither the Neocons?



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SPIRIT OF '36

Philip Jenkins's "Spirit of '76" (Dec. 15) is a fine work of scholarship, but I see history conforming more to Justin Raimondo's article ("American Omen"). The Spirit of '36, deftly reconstructed by Raimondo, reigned in a time of economic crisis, with its main feature being that no matter how bad the Democratic president was, Republicans were worse.

The auto bailout talks showed the Spirit of '36 alive and well with free-trade ideology and government omnipotence in the driver's seat of the Republican agenda. Instead of looking to the Constitution and aiding the industry through tariffs and import quotas, which Congress can authorize under Article I, Section 8, Senate Republicans chose to look like corporate shills twice over by accepting the notion of corporate welfare then conditioning the largesse upon wage cuts to assembly-line workers.

Now, as an economic matter, pay packages to Big Three employees may have to come down. But for Republicans to attempt to hasten this is as lousy a political move as one could conjure. If an economic tsunami comes in the wake of bankruptcies at the Big Three, as predicted by Pat Choate ("Mom, Apple Pie, and Hyundai?"), Republicans will be blamed with their defense seeming to be that Detroit wasn't becoming like Wal-Mart fast enough.

Thus Democrats will continue to dominate, with Obama's image likely ending up on a coin while the GOP basks in the distinction of what it's been since FDR's time—the stupid party.

JAMES MOSHER

Ledyard, Conn.

PLEASE DON'T CHANGE

Philip Jenkins's article is not only ridiculously superficial analysis but also betrays an incredible desire to see this administration fail. The main analogy is hilarious—by comparing Obama to

Carter, you've implicitly said that Bush is Nixon. Have fun with that.

The scandalous part of this idiotic article is in the second to last paragraph: "A blinded and disarmed Obama administration will then blunder anew into confrontations that will once again plumb the depths of national humiliation—if not in Iran, then in Taiwan, Ukraine, Venezuela, or Pakistan. If we're very unlucky, airliners will again be crashing into our skyscrapers and cargo ships will be exploding in our ports."

Does Jenkins want this to happen just because he wants to see a Democratic administration fail? Incredible. This article sounds like it's written by a very jealous and sad person, hoping, just hoping, that the other team—I assume the "liberals" he keeps talking about, as if that term has any real meaning—will destroy our country almost as badly as his team did.

The path to your party's resurrection lies in your ability to understand what you did wrong over the last eight years—not in waiting until the Obama administration makes mistakes. But please don't change your party's core principles and keep waiting for Obama to screw things up—that will make 2012 that much easier for "liberals."

SANJEEV RANADE

Via e-mail

AUDACIOUS HOPES

Your article exploring the idea of Obama repeating many of Carter's mistakes was fantastic and informative. As an ardent Obama supporter, I must disagree, however, for several reasons.

The '76 Congress contained enough boll weevil Dems to provide a close fight for any piece of legislation. Obama's Democrats are generally united, and the Republicans are now fractured. Moreover, Obama has at least some Senate experience. Carter had none and was terrible at working with Senate leaders.

Although you are right about Carter

being a product of the nation's disgust at Vietnam and Watergate, and about Obama being aided by Bush's unpopularity, the American people voted far more for actual policies in 2008 than in 1976. Bush was unpopular, but never came close to resigning, and his vice president was not arrested. Iraq has not lasted as long nor claimed even a fraction of the lives lost in Vietnam.

Finally, economic crises ousted both Bush 43 and Carter. If you believe at all in a cyclical economy, things will be booming by 2012. The recession that began under Carter did not end until 1982, due to methods Paul Volcker used to combat stagflation, and he is now one of Obama's main economic advisers. This recession will not last 5 years.

LIAM MCINTYRE

Via e-mail

Philip Jenkins replies:

In response to Mr. Ranade, I am not interested in cyclical theories of history—if I were, then I suppose Bush would be Gerald Ford rather than Nixon. My concern is that the Democratic Party shows every sign of reproducing precisely the blunders they committed in the late 1970s, with the likelihood that similar disasters would follow, and this fact troubles me greatly. I won't bother to respond to the silly and offensive suggestion that I actually want to see America suffer terror attacks.

I very much hope Mr. McIntyre is right in his economic prognosis. I fear, though, that the Democrats are very likely to blow it. Do recall that New Deal policies led directly to the second Crash, of 1937-38.

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McGovern Beats Nixon

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[ECONOMY]

INFLATED EXPECTATIONS

Imagine you've bought a stack of *Weekly Standard* back issues—not because you want to read them (who would?) but because you imagine they might appreciate in value. Only they don't. Sooner or later, your dreams of avarice frustrated, you might just want to get rid of the things for whatever they'll sell for. A bad investment is a sunk cost, and holding on to the goods won't make you richer.

When something is overvalued, sooner or later its price will fall: that's what has happened with stocks and real estate. A lot of people bought houses in the expectation that prices, in defiance of gravity and common sense, could only rise. Banks invested trillions in the same delusion. But as the old saying goes, if you owe the casino a thousand dollars, you have a problem; if you owe the casino a million, it has a problem. So where do the financial firms turn? To their friends and alumni in Washington, like Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, to beg for bailouts at taxpayer expense.

Paulson believes that nothing is worse than deflation. Falling prices lead to businesses closing, which leads to layoffs and more workers (or ex-workers) saving their cash, which leads to lower sales, lower prices, more businesses closing, and more unemployment.

Already we see it happening. Fuel prices have plummeted. The consumer price index tumbled a record-breaking 1.7 percent in November. The Fed reacted by setting interest rates to their lowest ever—"a target range" of zero to .25 percent. Uncle Sam says, borrow and buy.

But hold on. According to the *Washington Post*, "Excluding food and energy prices, which are particularly volatile, so-called core inflation was flat, at 0 percent." Food prices didn't significantly drop, thus almost all of the price

plunge came from one thing: fuel, which has indeed become cheaper in recent weeks. Outside of that, rising and falling prices balanced out—no deflation, no inflation.

Some deflation is to be expected in a cooling economy. But speculators and Keynesians fear even mild deflation—and even price stability. Hence the Fed and Treasury attempts to pump up prices and foster consumerism at a time when Americans ought to be saving more and awakening from their reveries of easy money. The government's policies risk sparking out-of-control inflation. That's what's coming when the money that banks are hoarding in reserve gets unleashed again as the economy thaws.

Look at it this way: it's no use selling those *Weekly Standard* back issues for five times what you paid for them if the money is worth ten times less than before.

[EXECUTIVE]

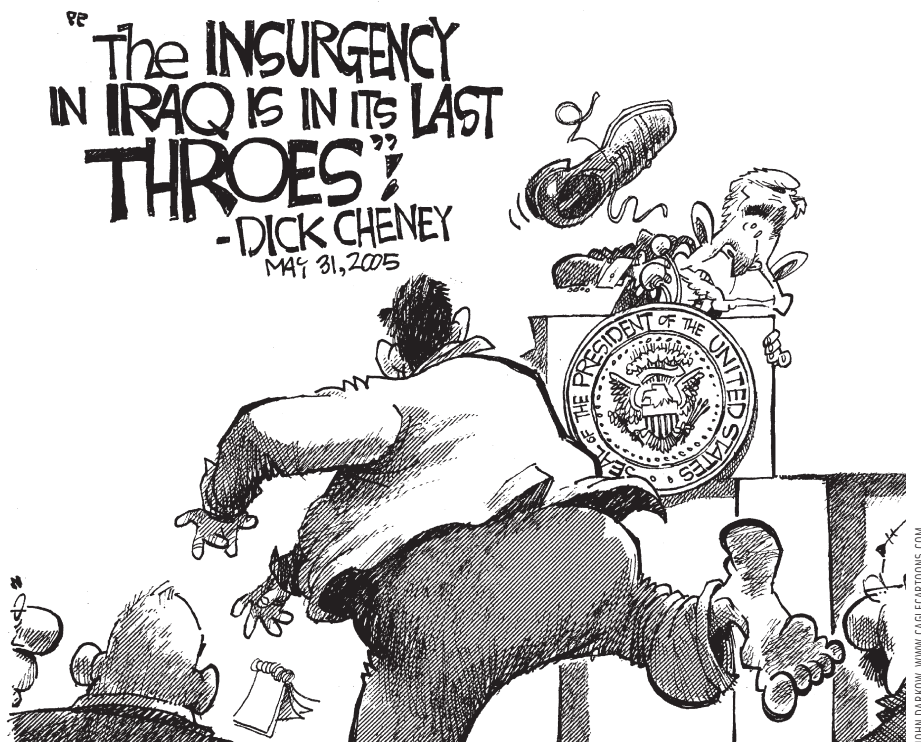
TERROR WAR CRIMES

It's official: torture became the policy of the United States at the behest of president Bush and senior cabinet officials, according to the Senate Armed Services Committee report on the treatment of detainees. With no dissents, the committee concluded, "Senior officials in the

United States government solicited information on how to use aggressive techniques, redefined the law to create the appearance of their legality, and authorized their use against detainees." Stress positions, subjection to loud music or extreme temperatures, stripping prisoners naked and humiliating them, leashing them like animals, siccing dogs on them—these sadisms were enumerated and discussed at length by cabinet officials, then authorized.

The details are chilling: "the techniques used were based, in part, on Chinese Communist techniques used during the Korean War to elicit false confessions." And the excuse that "a few bad apples" perpetrated these crimes was dismissed by the committee, which reported, "Donald Rumsfeld's authorization of aggressive interrogation techniques for use at Guantanamo Bay was a direct cause of detainee abuse there." President Bush himself made the "decision to replace well established military doctrine, i.e., legal compliance with the Geneva Conventions, with a policy subject to interpretation."

But the enabler-in-chief won't be called to account for sully America's reputation and corrupting its military. A few low-ranking men have been punished for detainee abuse, but those who



ordered the crimes face nothing more than a dense report dropped on a Thursday afternoon as the capital cleared out for Christmas.

[ENTITLEMENT]

PYRAMID THEME

When he was arrested for bilking investors of \$50 billion, Bernard Madoff confessed, "There is no innocent explanation." The former NASDAQ chairman had accumulated bright trophies: a lavish Upper East Side apartment, a landmark office building bearing his name, a client list straight from the society pages, a yacht called *Bull*. Over nearly five decades on Wall Street, Madoff had become legendary for weatherproof returns. Now he's even more famous—as the swindler who shamed Ponzi. Global banks and billionaire families fell victim, but so too did retirees and charities that trusted him with everything they had.

Madoff's crime seems particularly remorseless, but the mechanics aren't so novel. At Lew Rockwell's blog, Christopher Manion noted, "It seems to me that Madoff was just running a Social Security program without a license. His designer program differed from the routine in two ways: Voluntary contributions were accepted from the super-rich. In the real program, mandatory protection money is stolen by force from the poor and middle class. The reason every Social Security 'Reform' effort of the past failed is simple: like Madoff's kitty, there was no 'there' there when reformers went to look for the 'saved' money so they could invest it more wisely. The money had all been spent, immediately."

We're staring down an \$11 trillion debt while swearing in a president who promises to mend our ills with a slew of new spending. How is that more solvent or less indulgent than the Madoff scheme? It isn't—except that "when the president does it, it isn't illegal."

[WORLD]

LAME DUCKING

The Iraqi shoe-throwing incident revealed more than commendable presidential reflexes. It showed just how oblivious President Bush is to the culture of the countries he set out to renovate.

"I've seen a lot of weird things during my presidency, and this may rank up there as one of the weirdest," he told reporters on his flight home. But this wasn't quite equivalent to Helen Thomas tossing her purse in the White House briefing room. Across the Muslim world, the scene was laden with significance—the soles of the feet are the lowest, dirtiest part of a person; showing them is a grave insult. That is why the Iraqi government denounced Muntadar al-Zeidi's actions as "shameful." Only incurious George didn't know to blush.

As we go to press, al-Zeidi is still in custody, reportedly with a broken arm and ribs for recklessly test-driving that new freedom of the press. Thousands of Iraqis have taken to the streets calling for his release and hailing him as a hero. But don't expect President Bush to notice: he was unfazed by having to sneak into the country he apparently liberated.

He's ready for Iraq to be someone else's problem. In a recent interview with ABC's Martha Raddatz, Bush noted, "One of the major theaters against al-Qaeda turns out to have been Iraq." "But not until after the U.S. invaded," Raddatz countered. The telltale answer: "Yeah, that's right. So what?" ■

In keeping with our usual production schedule, *TAC* will be closed for the holidays. Our editorial offices will reopen Jan. 5, and we'll return to print Jan. 15. Until then, enjoy our blogs, which are updated daily. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

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[breaking ranks]

Where Have All the Neocons Gone?

Having wrecked the Right, will neoconservatives revert to their left-wing origins or double down on the GOP?

By Jacob Heilbrunn

AS BARACK OBAMA prepares to take the inaugural oath, it almost seems otiose to note that his victory represents a sweeping repudiation of the neoconservative movement. Though neocons such as Randy Scheunemann formed a kind of Praetorian Guard around John McCain during his presidential campaign, their truculent approach to foreign affairs sabotaged rather than strengthened McCain's electoral appeal. The best that Sarah Palin, a foreign-policy neocon on training wheels, could do was to offer platitudes about standing by Israel. It seems safe to say, then, that the neocon credo is ready to be put out to pasture.

Or is it? One problem with this line of argument is that it's been heard before—sometimes from the neoconservatives themselves. In 1988, after George H.W. Bush replaced Ronald Reagan, neocon lioness Midge Decter fretted, “are we a long, sour marriage held together for the kids and now facing an empty nest?” Then in the late 1990s, Norman Podhoretz delivered a valedictory for neoconservatism at the American Enterprise Institute. Neoconservatism, he announced, was a victim of its success. It no longer represented anything unique because the GOP had so thoroughly assimilated its doctrines. In 2004, a variety of commentators scrambled to

pronounce a fresh obituary for neoconservatism. The disastrous course of the Iraq War, *Foreign Policy* editor Moisés Naím said, showed that the neoconservative dream had expired in the sands of Araby.

Yet the neocons show few signs of going away. The Iraq surge was devised by Frederick Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute and spearheaded by William Luti, a protégé of Newt Gingrich and Dick Cheney who is currently at the National Security Council. Its success has prompted some neocons to claim vindication for the Iraq War overall. Nor has the network of institutions that the neocons rely upon melted away, from the Hudson Institute, where Scooter Libby and Douglas J. Feith are now ensconced, to the *Weekly Standard* and Fox News.

It's also the case that the realists inside the GOP feel more embattled than ever. Sen. Chuck Hagel has pretty much resigned from the GOP itself as well as from his Senate seat, denouncing Rush Limbaugh and others as retrograde conservatives. What's more, former national security adviser Brent Scowcroft, who has co-authored a new book with Zbigniew Brzezinski about the challenges facing the next president, has been informally advising Obama. Scowcroft told CNN, “I think we devel-

oped in the Republican Party a—well, you know, the buzzword for it is ‘neoonism.’ But I think what it is, it's an ideology—it's really an idealistic approach to things. But it's a combination of idealism and, if you will, brute force.” As Scowcroft sees it, the neocons remain in control of the GOP. “Where do I go?” he recently asked me.

Still, if the neocons aren't necessarily on the ropes, it would probably be equally mistaken to deny that something has changed. They have undeniably suffered a number of setbacks. The sun has set on the flagship neocon newspaper, the *New York Sun*, a victim of the financial crash. The citadel of neoconservatism, AEI, has ousted Michael Ledeen, Joshua Muravchik, and Reuel Marc Gerecht. Meanwhile, Robert Kagan has incorporated realist tenets into his writings, while David Frum, who co-wrote with Richard Perle the standard neocon foreign-policy text, *An End to Evil*, and who previously demanded the expulsion of allegedly unpatriotic conservatives from the conservative pantheon (a move Russell Baker called reminiscent of the Moscow purges), now seems to be hinting at, among other things, a reassessment of neocon foreign policy. “I cannot be blind,” he conceded in a farewell address to *National Review Online* last month, “to the evidence ...

that the foreign policy I supported has not yielded the success I would have wished to see.”

Looking ahead, the neocons do not have an obvious horse. In the past they have glommed on to everyone from Sen. Henry M. “Scoop” Jackson to Colin Powell, whom William Kristol briefly touted for president. Another problem is that George W. Bush himself has increasingly deviated from neoconservatism. With the fall of Donald Rumsfeld, on whom the neocons tried to blame the mismanaged Iraq War, Vice President Dick Cheney has lost out to the combination of Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Even Kristol seems to have shed some of his habitual fervor, musing about the shortcomings of capitalism in his *New York Times* column and expressing the hope that Obama will put aright what has gone wrong.

LIKE NOT A FEW REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS THAT HAVE FALLEN ON HARD TIMES, NEOCONSERVATISM IS EXPERIENCING A SCHISM.

The result has been something of an identity crisis in the ranks of the neocons. Like not a few revolutionary movements that have fallen on hard times, neoconservatism is experiencing a schism. Two camps are starting to face off over the question of the true faith, with the first embracing orthodoxy and the second heresy. The question they face is simple: Should the neocons continue to move right, serving as the advance guard of an embattled GOP? Or should neoconservatism become true to itself by returning to the center? Will the movement, in fact, morph back into what it was at its inception in the late 1960s when it belonged firmly to the Democratic Party—moderate on domestic issues and mildly hawkish on foreign policy?

The orthodox camp is based mostly in New York. It wants to combat the decadent liberal elites—the new class—that are supposedly corrupting the Republic. It views Barack Obama as a dangerous, unreconstructed 1960s-type radical and pins its hopes on Alaska governor Sarah Palin. Writing in the November issue of the British neocon journal *Standpoint*, Midge Decter, for example, upbraids Palin critics for their unwillingness to recognize her brilliance. Decter, a longtime foe of the feminist movement, depicts Palin as someone of unalloyed virtue who incarnates the Victorian virtues celebrated by Gertrude Himmelfarb. According to Decter, Palin is “young, handsome, clever, firmly married, a mother, a serious Christian, a right-to-lifer who has been successful at virtually everything ... to which she has turned a hand or mind or body.” Obama, by contrast, offers “for those with ears

around elite universities since he was eighteen years old ...” And Podhoretz’s surprising conclusion? The election did not repudiate the notion that America is a center-right country.

The second and more novel camp consists of what might be called heretical reverts. Reverters dismiss the notion that America has not changed. One of the shrewdest and most perceptive neocons, Tod Lindberg of the Hoover Institution, noted in the *Washington Post*, “Here’s the stark reality: It is now harder for the Republican presidential candidate to get to 50.1 percent than for the Democrat.” The reverts—who include, among others, David Frum and David Brooks, and are largely based in Washington, D.C.—suggest that the GOP needs to get up to speed, to dump overboard the detritus that it has accumulated over the past several decades. They want no part of Sarah Palin, seeing her as a recipe for electoral disaster. They also see the fate of the British Tories, who have wandered in the wilderness for years, as a cautionary tale. The argument of the reverts, at bottom, seems to be that neoconservatism needs to reboot. Indeed, the reverts even seem to have discovered a new female savior—Hillary Clinton. And so, if neoconservatism has a future, it’s in the Democratic more than the Republican Party.

To understand this new development, it’s helpful to consider the arc of neoconservatism. In its original incarnation, neoconservatism’s salvation doctrine was to reconvert the Democratic Party to its anticommunist roots and a more sober view of social policy. Irving Kristol called for a “combination of the reforming spirit with the conservative ideal”—the notion that liberalism could conserve the best in conservatism. Former *Wall Street Journal* editor Robert Bartley, who did much to smooth the path of the neocons into the GOP, astutely observed in 1972 that the

neocons “are something of a swing group between the two major parties. Their political outlook is that of establishmentarians looking for an establishment worthy of the name, and many of them are longtime Democrats with new Republican leanings.”

There can be no doubt that as staunch cold warriors, or, if you prefer, liberal internationalists, the neocons viewed the Republican Party, which was led by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, both realists and promoters of détente, with unease. The neocons, who had started out as Trotskyists, espoused a social-democratic program in domestic policy. Essentially, they were Hubert Humphrey Democrats. The neocons clustered around Sen. Scoop Jackson, whose adviser was Richard Perle. They didn’t want détente with the GOP itself; they beseeched Democrats to decry their opponents as selling out human rights and American ideals.

Then came Jimmy Carter. Despite Carter’s support for human rights abroad, the neocons bridled at his derogation of the communist threat and failure to support the shah of Iran from being overthrown by radical Islamists. The neocons became counterrevolutionaries. Their failure to create regime change in the Democratic Party meant that they began enlisting in the GOP. More precisely, they flocked to the banner of Ronald Reagan, a former New Deal Democrat turned conservative, or, in their eyes, the first neocon. Neocons such as Elliott Abrams and Jeane Kirkpatrick landed posts in the Reagan administration, but the true believers on the outside weren’t satisfied. Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, and Midge Decter all chided Reagan for his pragmatism. Podhoretz even condemned him for “appeasement by any other name” for his policies in the Middle East and toward the Soviet Union. Later, Podhoretz claimed that Reagan was suffer-

ing from delusions about the Cold War, indulging in the “fantasy of communist collapse.” Once the evil empire imploded, the neocons embarked upon the new project of reconciling Jews and evangelicals within the GOP.

Yet no matter how fervent their embrace of the GOP may have been, the neocons began to flirt with the Democratic Party once more when Bill Clinton was the nominee in 1992. This was the first sign of an alliance between the liberal hawks and neocons that would flourish during George W. Bush’s presidency. The neocons had found the realist George H.W. Bush wanting for his failure to topple Saddam Hussein, his attempts to curb Jewish settlements in the West Bank, his refusal to intervene in the Balkans, and his tepid response

ing abroad. The new Popular Front forged between the neocons and liberal hawks collapsed during the Iraq War, however, as liberals bailed out once the war went south.

Might there be a reunion, this time with the neocons courting the liberal hawks rather than the liberal hawks trying to court the neocons? The more conciliatory neocons have begun to send up signal flares. It isn’t simply David Brooks’s paeans to Obama. Robert Kagan has praised what he calls “Obama the Interventionist” in his *Washington Post* column: “Obama believes the world yearns to follow us, if only we restore our worthiness to lead. Personally, I like it.” Even the *Weekly Standard* has begun to reassess its seemingly intractable hostility to all

THEY FLOCKED TO THE BANNER OF RONALD REAGAN, A FORMER NEW DEAL DEMOCRAT TURNED CONSERVATIVE, OR, IN THEIR EYES, THE FIRST NEOCON.

to Tiananmen Square. Clinton, by contrast, denounced the “butchers of Beijing” and seemed to offer the prospect of tough action in the Balkans against the Serbs. The refusal of Clinton to appoint any neocons, apart from providing Richard Schifter with the token position of assistant secretary for human rights, did little to maintain their ardor. Still, as Clinton’s second term neared its end, neoconservatives such as Norman Podhoretz, writing in *National Review*, assessed his tenure fairly favorably. As Podhoretz noted, Clinton had been no pushover: he intervened in the Balkans and launched missiles at Iraq. Moreover, he severely curbed welfare benefits. In short, the McGovern era had come to end with Clintonite centrism. It was realist Republicans, to the consternation of William Kristol and Robert Kagan, who were denouncing Clinton for interven-

things Clinton. Vigilant neocon-spotters will have noticed that the *Standard* featured not one but two items praising the idea of Hillary as secretary of state. The tone of both seemed to be “yes, we should.” Under the heading “Hail Clinton,” Michael Goldfarb, McCain’s deputy communications director during the campaign, blogged that she is “likely to be a nuisance to Obama whether she is inside or outside of his administration, but as our top diplomat she could reprise a role that made Powell a kingmaker in this year’s election. And perhaps she could even present the case for war with Iran to an insubordinate United Nations in the event that Obama’s personal diplomacy somehow fails to deter the mullahs from their present course.”

The *Standard*’s Noemie Emery went even further. In her view, “For the moment, Hillary Clinton will be the con-

servatives' Woman in Washington, more attuned to their concerns on these issues than to those of the get-the-troops-home-now wing of her party, a strange turn of events for a woman whose husband was impeached by Republicans just ten years ago, and whose ascent that party had dreaded since she went to the Senate two years after that." Indeed.

The fact is that the neocon passion for Hillary may not be as outlandish as it seems at first glance. For one thing, Hillary was instrumental in getting Madeleine Albright appointed secretary of state in 1997, and they remain close friends. Albright is a liberal interventionist of the first order. Her father, Josef Korbel, a former Czech diplomat, was a cold warrior. Albright herself ardently pushed for intervention in the Balkans, first as Clinton's United Nations ambassador, then, more effectively, as secretary of state. Albright will have the opportunity to weigh in on hot-button foreign-policy issues such as relations with Russia.

In addition, Albright, together with former Clinton defense secretary William S. Cohen, has headed a U.S. Institute for Peace and Holocaust Museum task force on genocide. Its new report, released on Dec. 8, is called "Preventing Genocide." It could prove almost as influential for the Obama administration as the neocon-inspired "Defense Planning Guidance" of 1992, which called for American unilateral domination of the world, was for George W. Bush's presidency. Albright and Cohen's document calls for the creation of an Atrocities Prevention Committee that would work with key national security officials. It further states that the director of national intelligence should "initiate the preparation of a National Intelligence Estimate on worldwide risks of genocide and mass atrocities." Finally, it recommends that the secre-

tary of defense and U.S. military leaders develop military guidance on genocide prevention and response and "incorporate it into Department of Defense (and interagency) policies, plans, doctrine, training, and lessons learned." The report's aims are noble, but it is essentially a stalking horse for liberal intervention. It would create a permanent bureaucracy with a vested interest in insisting upon armed interventionism whenever and wherever the U.S. pleases—the Congo, Georgia, Zimbabwe, Somalia, and so on.

Indeed, Hillary may appoint a number of liberal interventionists. Russia-expert Michael McFaul, a fellow at the Hoover Institution, is an adviser to Obama and is reportedly angling for the post of assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor. In 2007, writing in the *Washington Post*, together with Abbas Milani, McFaul argued, "the United States must recommit to a policy of encouraging democratization inside Iran, because only a democratic regime will stop supporting terrorist groups abroad and repression at home." McFaul also wants to push for democracy inside Russia. Another possible Clinton appointment might be Samantha Power, who has strenuously advocated more intervention backed by the United Nations. Power declared in *Time* in 2007 that as abuses mount in Burma and Darfur "a coalition of the concerned must insist that what is manifestly true of the economy is also true of human rights: in this age, there is no such thing as a purely 'internal matter.'" How far removed is this from Bush's rhetoric about freedom sweeping the globe in his second inaugural address?

Power's conclusion epitomizes the distinction between the liberal interventionists and neocons on one side and realists on the other. Realists tend to believe that the internal nature of a state

does not decisively affect its foreign-policy decisions. A democratic Iran might be no less likely than an authoritarian Iran to seek nuclear weapons. The country simply pursues its traditional national interests. Liberal interventionists take a different view. They want to expand democratic norms, by force if necessary, around the globe in the hopes of advancing the dream of a perpetual peace.

Whether or not Hillary actually behaves like a hawk in office is another question. She might seek to push peace talks on Israel and the Palestinians. Reaching an agreement with Iran would be a big feather in her cap. So would negotiating an arms-control deal with Russia in exchange for dismantling the Bush administration's proposed missile-defense system in Eastern Europe.

But the notion that Obama will seek to roll back the American empire is a pipedream. It wasn't McCain but Obama who declared on the campaign trail that America has to "lead the world in battling immediate evils and promoting the ultimate good."

This won't prevent the unrepentant rump faction of the neocons from denouncing Obama as an appeaser, while looking to either Sarah Palin or Newt Gingrich as possible standard-bearers. But for now, the neocons tout-ing a reversion to the movement's original, more liberal precepts seem intent on creating a new chapter in the saga of a movement that has been repeatedly written off as dead. Perhaps reaching out to the Obama administration will help rejuvenate neoconservatism. It could prove to be a more comfortable fit than either side might anticipate. ■

Jacob Heilbrunn, whose book They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons has just appeared in paperback, is a senior editor at The National Interest.

Bailout Blago

The governor was too honest for Washington.

By Justin Raimondo

THE STONING of Rod Blagojevich recalls Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," a sinister short story about the inhabitants of an otherwise placid village where, periodically, someone's name is chosen out of a hat for a public stoning. Like much of Jackson's idiosyncratic fiction, a dark river of fear runs beneath the formal narrative—in this case fear of randomness, of sudden death at the hands of fate. It was, perhaps, Blagojevich's fate to go down in history as a symbol of political corruption, Chicago's Boss Tweed and the most infamous of mobster-politicians. Yet one can't help but think it could have happened to anyone—to any member of the political class, that is.

This scandal is noteworthy because of the honesty and purity of its protagonist, the Illinois governor who has become a leper in the political universe because he didn't deign to dress up his avarice and power-lust in the language of "public service" and altruism. With his fishwife of a first lady swearing in the background, the governor laid it all on the table, demanding cash for political favors, trying to sell Barack Obama's Senate seat to the highest bidder, and seeking to have members of the *Chicago Tribune's* editorial board fired as the price for state aid to the beleaguered Tribune Company. He was, in short, doing what all politicians do: dispensing favors to his supporters and punishing his enemies by withholding the same. "Why," asked H.L. Mencken, "should democracy rise against bribery? It is itself a form of wholesale bribery."

While the sale of Obama's Senate seat has garnered the lion's share of attention, the aspect of this case that gave rise to

the most unladylike language from Illinois's first lady—shocking our pious pundits and media bloodhounds—was the attempted firing of those troublesome *Tribune* editorial writers who had been crusading to get the governor impeached. In pitching a deal to the business side of the Tribune Company, Blagojevich rightly pointed out to the chief financial officer that, in granting state aid to bail them out, he would be doing precisely what the newspaper's editorial writers had cited as grounds for his impeachment: going around the state legislature and directly handing out cash.

The source of this largesse was to be the Illinois Finance Authority, whose website describes it as "a self-financed state authority principally engaged in issuing taxable and tax-exempt bonds, making loans, and investing capital for businesses, non-profit corporations, agriculture and local government units statewide." With "about \$3 billion in project financing" to hand out each year, it has approved 780 projects to the tune of \$11 billion to "stimulate the economy"—and, no doubt, to stimulate the bank accounts of the governor's friends. This is, in short, a local version of what President Obama is proposing as his first act: a \$2 trillion "stimulus package."

Everybody knows that this world-historic chunk of moolah is going to be handed out to the president's friends and that politics—not public interest—is going to be the rule of thumb in deciding on whom to lavish the loot. Paul Krugman worries that so much money will not find enough projects to fund, but he needn't worry: the Blagojeviches of this world will find endless uses for it.

This is why the Obama-ites are desperate to put as much distance as possible between themselves and Blagojevich. Their entire political program is about doling out rewards to interest groups that supported them during the campaign: union power, money power, and corporate media power that did so much to make Obama-mania politically chic. Their economic "stimuli" will re-energize the sagging political fortunes of Democratic machine politicians from coast to coast. The Illinois Finance Authority will no doubt scarf up more than its fair share to fund the extortionate activities of present and future Chicago mobster-politicians and their clones across America. Imagine clouds of flies over a gigantic pile of offal, and you've visualized the scene once the economy is properly "stimulated."

Not surprisingly, the Obama operative who most resembles a character out of "The Sopranos"—Rahm Emanuel—reportedly had 21 conversations with the Blagojevich gang, whose language he speaks fluently. This, after all, is a guy who once had a two-and-a-half-foot rotting fish delivered to an adversary, and famously, at a late night gathering with other Clintonistas the day after Bill was first elected, grabbed a steak knife, shouted out the name of someone on their enemies list, and slammed the blade into a table with full force, screaming, "Dead!"

Who knows what Rahm the Enforcer and Boss Blagojevich were chatting about while the FBI listened. You can bet it didn't have much to do with the public interest.

Another potential victim of Blago-gate is the sainted Jesse Jackson Jr., who met with the governor hours before the Don Corleone of Illinois politics was hauled off to the hoosegow by Fitz and the feds. A few months before, the network of East Indian businessmen who fund Jackson got together and decided to raise a million bucks for Boss Blago-

— OLD AND RIGHT —

THE SPENDING OF BORROWED MONEY as a permanent policy with a continuous rise in the public debt can have only one effect. A rising public debt means a continuously rising interest charge and persistently rising taxes to service the debt. And this is only the beginning. For as the war ends, the government is planning new and more adventurous and, as it likes to say, “dynamic” uses of public debt than ever. ... Only in a totalitarian state can these oppressive levies be imposed and enforced...

We have, without knowing it, been turning first to one and then another of those devices for escaping our economic difficulties to which Italy and Germany turned before us. ... [E]ach of these devices offered the political administration the easiest escape. The alternative has been to make difficult and sacrificial corrections in our system and to make unpopular alterations in our course. These sacrificial measures and hard corrections are possible and might be made under a courageous and heroic leadership. Instead we have had a confused, selfish, and utterly political leadership which has sought out, not the remedies, but the special demands of great and powerful minorities and set about satisfying those demands—running with the streams even though the streams were running over the abyss. ... Always we adorn those measures here with decorative and patriotic names, while giving to the same measures in Italy and Germany odious names...

The test of fascism is not one's rage against the Italian and German warlords. The test is—how many of the essential principles of fascism do you accept and to what extent are you prepared to apply those fascist ideas to American social and economic life? When you can put your finger on the men or the groups that urge for America the debt-supported state, the autarchial corporative state, the state bent on the socialization of investment and the bureaucratic government of industry and society, the establishment of the institution of militarism as the great glamorous public-works project of the nation and the institution of imperialism under which it proposes to regulate and rule the world and, along with this, proposes to alter the forms of our government to approach as closely as possible the unrestrained, absolute government—then you will know you have located the authentic fascist...

Fascism will come at the hands of perfectly authentic Americans, as violently against Hitler and Mussolini as the next one, but who are convinced that the present economic system is washed up and that the present political system in America has outlived its usefulness and who wish to commit this country to the rule of the bureaucratic state; interfering in the affairs of the states and cities; taking part in the management of industry and finance and agriculture; assuming the role of great national banker and investor, borrowing billions every year and spending them on all sorts of projects through which such a government can paralyze opposition and command public support; marshaling great armies and navies ... and adding to all of this the most romantic adventures in global planning, regeneration, and domination all to be done under the authority of a powerfully centralized government in which the executive can hold in effect all the powers with Congress reduced to the role of a debating society. There is your fascist...

It is part of the government's plan to continue this new and abrasive order. ... We shall presently be presented with the final crisis—the necessity of taking the last few steps of the last mile to fascism in some generated crisis, of ending the prologue and running up the curtain on the swelling theme—or of calling off the whole wretched business in some costly, yet inescapable, convulsion.

—As *We Go Marching*, John T. Flynn, 1944

jevich, an act of charity that had nothing whatsoever to do with influencing him to appoint their man to Obama's seat.

“People know me,” Jackson avers. “They know who I am. I'm confident that no one on my behalf made a single offer to anybody for anything.” Well, you don't really know someone until you've listened in on his private conversations, which the feds may well have been doing when Jesse Jr. met with the Boss.

With Patrick Fitzgerald listening in on the other end, it looks like Jesse Jr., Rahm, and any number of Illinois Democratic Party muckamucks have met their nemesis. They don't call him “Bulldog” Fitzgerald for nothing—a nickname Scooter Libby came to realize was well-earned and one the holier-than-thou Obama-ites will have good reason to remember.

During the Scooter scandal, the left wing of the blogosphere endlessly dissected each development, eagerly anticipating “Fitzmas” back in the winter of '05. Now that the tables are turned, however, it doesn't matter how many interesting angles and side-narratives this affair develops: the folks over at DailyKos, Firedoglake, and the Huffington Post won't be mapping the highways and byways of corruption as they were last Fitzmas.

This year, a new crowd will be celebrating the season, with the Bulldog playing Santa and showering them with gifts. So join in the holiday cheer because

It's beginning to look a lot like Fitzmas
Everywhere you go!
Can't you just hear those wiretaps,
Oh don't keep it under wraps
We could use a laugh or two these
days, you know!

It's beginning to look a lot like Fitzmas,
A bug in every phone!
But the prettiest sight to see
Is the indictment that could be
Tacked to the White House door. ■

Justin Raimondo is editorial director of Antiwar.com.

Bad Deal

FDR's public works only exacerbated the Depression.

By Sheldon Richman

NEVER HAS THE PHRASE “the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression” been uttered so often. Reporters and commentators routinely discuss our current financial woes as though it were 1930 again. Pundits and even economists urge President-elect Barack Obama to launch a “new New Deal” as soon as he takes office. Thus it might be useful to revisit the original Great Depression and New Deal to see what actually happened and what lessons we might draw for the present crisis.

The first thing to understand is that these events did not occur in an environment of *laissez faire*. Contrary to popular accounts, government intervention in the U.S. economy did not begin in 1933 with the inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt. Before that America was no land of unregulated markets. Far from it. Government had intervened in the economy from the very beginning: the first economic act of the first Congress—on July 4, 1789—was a comprehensive protective tariff. Before long, the banking industry, in particular, faced detailed federal and state regulation. Significantly, branch and interstate banking were forbidden. Free-market banking did not exist, and the gold standard was limited.

In 1913, the political class, which included big bankers, decided that a more systematic regulatory regime was needed to keep the economy on an even keel. Hence, the Federal Reserve System—in essence a government-sponsored banking cartel—was born.

The chronology is important because the worst U.S. depression occurred 15 years after the Fed opened. Someone ignorant of history and economics might guess the Fed was set up to prevent a repeat of the Great Depression, but he would be wrong.

As for the events of 1929 and onward, we may start with a remark by Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke. Speaking at a celebration of Milton Friedman's 90th birthday, Bernanke, at the time a member—but not yet chairman—of the Fed's Board of Governors, said, “I would like to say to Milton and Anna [Schwartz, coauthor with Friedman of *A Monetary History of the United States*]: ‘Regarding the Great Depression, you're right. We did it. We're very sorry.’”

How did they do it? According to economist Murray Rothbard's history of the period, *America's Great Depression*, the 1920s were marred by the Federal Reserve's inflation of credit in 1921-22, 1924 (a presidential election year), and 1927. The Fed's policy, backed by the pro-business Republican administration of Calvin Coolidge and Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon, began as a way to end the 1920-21 depression. Other motives were at work, however, such as facilitating exports through easy loans to foreign governments and helping Great Britain cope with its wartime inflation by re-establishing its prewar gold-to-sterling ratio.

According to Rothbard, the money supply grew by nearly 62 percent, or 7.7 percent a year on average. “The inflation of the 1920s was actually over by the end

of 1928. ... And therefore, from that time onward, a depression to adjust the economy was inevitable,” he added.

Why inevitable? To answer this we must understand the role of interest rates in a free market. Other things being equal, people prefer goods in the present to goods in the future. If they are to defer consumption, they typically must be compensated. That rate of compensation is an interest rate. This “time preference” can vary in intensity. One person might be willing to lend money at 5 percent, while another might insist on 10 percent. The market interest rate emerges from competition among lenders and borrowers. Changes in the rate, absent government intervention, signal real changes in people's time preferences. Interest rates rise when people reduce savings and consume more; interest rates fall when people decide to defer consumption and save more.

These signals guide entrepreneurs in their decisions about how to invest scarce resources in a structure of production with many stages and time periods. High rates signal that scarce capital should go toward consumer goods and producer goods that are close to the consumer-goods stage. Low rates signal more abundant savings and deferred consumption, telling producers that they can invest in longer-term projects at stages of production further removed from the consumer-goods stage.

It is this critical time-signaling function that is damaged when the government's central bank expands the money

supply. The Fed inflated in the 1920s precisely to lower the interest rate below the free-market level. Since the signals created by the Fed were false in the sense that they were not aligned with consumers' true time preferences, producers and investors behaved differently than they would have in a free market, that is, in ways they would regard as erroneous later. That behavior changed relative prices and distorted the structure of production. Thus the 1920s boom—built as it was on false expectations induced by the Fed's easy credit—was unsustainable. An end to the inflation would reveal malinvestment and necessitate correction—the depression phase of the government-created business cycle.

With the Fed's inflation over by the end of 1928, the bust was just a matter of time. The stock market crash in October 1929 left banks with unpaid loans, and their shaky condition eroded confidence and set off bank runs. Companies failed, and unemployment rose. All of this was the market's way of reasserting itself and attempting to correct for past errors created by the government's signal-tampering.

This might have been a one- or two-year depression, like those of the past, but the Fed's blunders did not end with the inflation. Once stock prices plummeted and banks lost reserves to worried depositors, the money supply contracted, something the Fed permitted and even facilitated. The central bank had been established as lender of last resort to the banking system, obviating the market's own solution to illiquidity. But the central bank abdicated its role at a critical time. The Fed's deflation was fatal to the economy. The Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises analogized about deflation in 1938, "If a man has been hurt by being run over by an automobile, it is no remedy to let the car go back over

him in the opposition [sic] direction." Friedman and Schwartz showed that the money supply shrank 27 percent from 1929 to 1933. With banks failing, people held on to their money and reduced consumption, which in turn left businesses without customers. So they laid off workers, who cut back on consumption. Hence the eventual secondary depression.

The government made things worse by aggressively interfering with the market correction. Contrary to common misconception, interference did not begin with Roosevelt's New Deal but rather with Herbert Hoover, who took office in March 1929. As one historian put it, Hoover, an engineer by profession and part of the Republican Party's progressive wing, was not the last of the old presidents but the first of the new. In previous depressions, the federal government typically cut spending and taxes and let the market liquidate bad investments. As a result, the depressions were relatively brief. This

were offset by factors beyond its control. Egregiously, Hoover personally pressured major corporations not to cut wages. (As commerce secretary, he had long been an advocate of government-business-labor "partnership," i.e., cartelization.) When wages are rigid while all other prices are falling, unemployment goes up.

The result of Hoover's program? Unemployment went from 3.2 percent in 1929 to over 25 percent in 1933. It remained in double digits until 1941, a year after the military draft started. GNP shrank 44 percent from 1929 to 1932.

"[W]e might have done nothing," Hoover said. "That would have been utter ruin. Instead we met the situation with proposals to private business and to Congress of the most gigantic program of economic defense and counter-attack ever evolved in the history of the Republic." This was the "Hoover New Deal," as economist Benjamin Anderson called it at the time. If interventionist economic theory were correct, Hoover's

FDR RAN ON A PROGRAM OF BALANCED BUDGETS, REDUCED GOVERNMENT SPENDING, AND SOUND MONEY, BUT ONCE IN OFFICE HE RAISED TAXES AND SPENDING TO NEW HEIGHTS AND CONFISCATED THE PEOPLE'S GOLD.

time around Hoover moved quickly to raise government spending and taxes of all kinds (the top marginal income-tax rate went from 24 to 63 percent); subsidize banks, railroads, industries, homeowners with mortgages, local governments, and farmers; and sign the infamous Smoot-Hawley Tariff. Even with the tax increases, the budget deficit ballooned to record levels. Hoover urged the nation's governors to increase public-works spending substantially and had the federal government join the effort. He favored new rounds of inflation, but the Fed's efforts

program should have been a smashing success and he should have been re-elected handily in 1932. But the economy deteriorated, and Roosevelt ignominiously defeated Hoover.

FDR ran on a program of balanced budgets, reduced government spending, and sound money, but once in office he raised taxes and spending to new heights and confiscated the people's gold. His list of New Deal programs is familiar, beginning with the fascistic National Recovery Administration, which cartelized industry; the Agricultural Adjustment Administra-

tion, which brought central planning to farming; banking and securities regulation; and the make-work Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration. The massive public-works spending helped Roosevelt politically, but did little to employ those most desperately in need. Journalist Walter Lippmann called the WPA “worse than a failure.” After the Supreme Court declared the NRA and AAA unconstitutional in 1935 and 1936, Roosevelt began the Second New Deal, which included Social Security, the National Labor Relations Act, and other impediments to free and competitive economic activity.

OBAMA HAS DECLARED HIS INTENTION TO **SPEND, NEW DEAL-STYLE**, HUNDREDS OF BILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO REBUILD **INFRASTRUCTURE**, MODERNIZE SCHOOLS, AND EXPAND THE **BROADBAND NETWORK**. NO MATTER HOW MERITORIOUS THESE PROJECTS, THEY **DO NOT CONSTITUTE A GENUINE RECOVERY PROGRAM**.

Yet with all this government activism, the U.S. economy, despite halting attempts at recovery, could not shake the Depression. In 1937 and 1938, the financial system went into an unprecedented secondary depression, with a new stock-market crash and unemployment climbing back to over 20 percent. Jim Powell notes in *FDR's Folly* that the New Deal further eroded the banking system; raised taxes; made hiring workers, particularly unskilled blacks, prohibitively expensive; increased the price of most goods, including food; and discouraged investment. This is hardly the New Deal we're taught in school. As historian David Kennedy put it, “Whatever it was, [the New Deal] was not a recovery program, or at any rate not an effective one.”

Roosevelt did not come into office with a detailed program based on a firm ideological foundation. Rather, he saw

himself as a pragmatist ready to try anything, an approach that engendered stultifying uncertainty. First, he mandated anticompetitive cartels; then he brought antitrust prosecutions against firms for monopolistic activity. Businesses were afraid to make long-term investment plans under such circumstances. Economic historian Robert Higgs writes in *Depression, War, and Cold War*, “Taken together, the many menacing New Deal measures, especially those from 1935 onward, gave business people and investors good reason to fear that the market economy might not survive in anything like its traditional form and that even more

drastic developments, perhaps even some kind of collectivist dictatorship, could not be ruled out entirely.”

The New Deal did not, therefore, end the Depression. Yet as Higgs shows, neither did World War II. If by “depression” we mean falling living standards as a result of economic inactivity, we can hardly count the war years, with their rationing and shortages of consumer goods, as years of prosperity. The draft is a bogus way to reduce unemployment. The Depression ended after the war, when labor and industry could turn to satisfying consumers, not government.

What can we learn from all this? That money is too important to be left to the state. One way or another, government mismanagement of the monetary system wrecked the U.S. economy. It's happening again now. The only perma-

nent way to avoid a repetition is to place the system where it belongs: in the free market.

Second, efforts to prevent liquidation of malinvestment caused by inflation bankrupt companies and only prolong economic agony. Bailouts are counterproductive. Assets must be revalued and rearranged in the light of reality.

Third, government stimulus spending, borrowing, taxation, and public works commandeer scarce private resources and prevent entrepreneurs from shifting them to investments aligned with consumer, not political, preferences. As Price Fishback of the University of Arizona points out, even FDR didn't try to stimulate the economy with extraordinary budget deficits, something for which Keynes criticized him.

Fourth, individual liberty is the first casualty when bureaucracy expands to manage the economy.

President-elect Obama would do well to take note, but we hardly have grounds for optimism. Obama has declared his intention to spend, New Deal-style, hundreds of billions of dollars—perhaps a trillion—to rebuild infrastructure, modernize schools, retrofit public buildings for energy efficiency, and expand the broadband network. No matter how meritorious these projects, they do not constitute a genuine recovery program. Government cannot escape the fact that it cannot create wealth. It can only transfer wealth from the private sector or create the illusion of wealth through inflation. Jobs created under inherently politicized programs will displace jobs the private sector would create if the burden of government were lifted and investor confidence restored.

It's about time we learned something from the New Deal. ■

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Simple the Best

MY GUESS IS that if you were stuck on a *National Review* cruise to Alaska and were to ask a passing conservative intellectual to name the six greatest British conservatives of the last century or so, he would come up with a list something like this: Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, Melanie Phillips, Andrew Roberts, and Sir Christopher Hitchens. One name that would not be on the list, I'm pretty sure, is Michael Wharton.

Some of the older hands at *NR* do know that Wharton was an important figure. When he died two years ago, the magazine carried a glowing obituary—that missed the point entirely. “One of the most influential prophets of the last half century’s great conservative free market revival in Britain has just died,” it declared.

On the contrary, Wharton was not a prophet of any free-market revival and loathed the world of what he called “imaginary money”—the world of Bernard Madoff. He was a reactionary, a feudalism, a fierce anticommunist who yet sympathized with the Soviet Union’s hostility to popular culture, and a champion of Whittaker Chambers and Richard Nixon. In his professional life, he was quite the sharpest and funniest conservative writer in postwar Britain, Evelyn Waugh not excepted. I commend him to American conservatives in this season of peace on earth to men of good will. He’ll make you laugh and snarl (in a nice way).

It is getting on to half a century since, as Peter Simple, Michael Wharton took over the Way of the World column in the *Daily Telegraph*. For 30 years, from 1960 until 1990, he wrote the column—which mixed satire and fantasy with polemical items—four days a week. Thereafter he wrote it

once a week. His last column appeared on Jan. 20, 2006, three days before his death at the age of 92.

Along with William F. Buckley Jr. and James Dean, Wharton/Simple was one of the heroes of my adolescence. I got to know him in the mid-1970s, when, having joined the *Sunday Telegraph*, I became a customer of the Kings and Keys, perhaps the most terrible pub on Fleet Street, the scene then of insane drinking by *Telegraph* staffers.

It was in the Kings and Keys and in his tiny office in the *Telegraph* building next door, and on the top deck of London buses, that he created a world of grotesques, many of them malign but some—like Pope Innocent the Terrible—wholly benign. He wrote from the perspective of a high aristocrat, but was far from being aristocratic, and for many years lived in the modest south London suburb of Battersea. He was mild-mannered, shy, and socially ill at ease.

Being of part German Jewish extraction on his father’s side, furthermore, he was perhaps a tad conflicted. His two volumes of autobiography, *The Missing Will* and *The Dubious Codicil*, are shot through with the sort of turmoil that results from reckless honesty. Here, for example, is how he describes his feelings at the time of the German invasion of the Soviet Union:

It seemed to me that to have been a German tank commander on that first morning, waiting on the fragrant turf, with the larks singing, for the order to advance into the blue distances of Russia, would have been to experience true military glory, perhaps for the last time in the history of the world. Were not the German armies, as they

advanced through White Russia and the Ukraine, welcomed at first as liberators, with flowers and crucifixes? And all this glory, through perverse stupidity, they were to throw away. It does not do to think of these things.

Indeed, it does not. No doubt that is why Michael preferred other worlds to his own: at least he knew where he was in outer space. In a column in February 2001, he described an exploratory journey to Pluto made by the columnar space-vehicle “Don Carlos and the Holy Alliance III.” Daguerreotypes received from space, he reported, showed that it was a kind of paradise:

There are fertile valleys, mountains neither too big nor too small for symmetry, trout streams and salmon rivers, forests plentifully supplied with deer and other game, as well as wolves and bears...

A hereditary class of great landowners presides over a russet-cheeked, contented peasantry toiling dutifully in the fields as their forebears have done from time immemorial, remarkable for their godly and healthy lives. Machines other than ploughshares and, interestingly, a few bicycles are nowhere to be seen...

Pluto was Michael’s ideal world, but he knew that his longing for such a place was ridiculous. Equally, though, he knew that the political dreams of Tory and Labour, of Republican and Democrat, were also ridiculous. The old ways are best, he used to say, and he convinced many of us that the only causes worth defending are lost causes. ■

McGovern Beats Nixon

How the South Dakota senator remade the Right

By Daniel McCarthy

GEORGE MCGOVERN is enjoying a renaissance. The 86-year-old ex-senator best known for losing the 1972 presidential election in an avalanche—he carried only one state, Massachusetts—won new friends among libertarians last spring with two startlingly laissez-faire op-eds in the *Wall Street Journal*. He'll receive further attention in January when Times Books publishes his *Abraham Lincoln*, the latest installment in the Sean Wilentz-edited American Presidents series. But sweetest of all for the senator from Mitchell, South Dakota, in November he finally came back to win the White House—or so you might think.

Republicans had a hard time distinguishing Barack Obama from the Democrat Nixon trounced 36 years earlier. Writing at *National Review Online*, Victor Davis Hanson christened the Illinois senator, “the Second Coming of McGovern.” In *Commentary*, Joshua Muravchik warned that Obama “comes to us from a background farther to the Left than any presidential nominee since McGovern, or perhaps ever.” His associates certainly seemed to come straight out of the McGovern bestiary: conservatives pounced on the opportunity to tie Obama to the New Left (via Bill Ayers) and black radicalism (via Rev. Jeremiah Wright). Among liberals, Hillary Clinton supporter Harold Ickes and the *New Republic's* John Judis also ventured comparisons between the 1972 and 2008 Democratic nominees.

And not without reason: Obama's primary base of students, blacks, and cultural leftists bore a striking resemblance to the McGovern coalition of yesteryear.

But for conservative Republicans, the demographic parallels were merely lagniappe—since for them every Democratic leader, no matter how Southern, how pro-war, how middle-of-the-road, is really a McGovernite. Indeed, for nearly 40 years the conservative movement has defined itself in opposition to the Democratic standard-bearer of 1972. Anti-McGovernism has come to play for the Right the unifying role that anticommunism once played, much to the detriment of older principles such as limited government, fiscal continence, and prudence in foreign policy.

That Republicans prefer to run against McGovern no matter whom the Democrats nominate is understandable enough. Nixon's victory against the South Dakotan was a blowout of historic proportions. The Democrat received just 37.5 percent of the popular vote to Nixon's 60.7 percent. The only electors McGovern won, besides those of Massachusetts, came from Washington, D.C. Even Walter Mondale performed better against Reagan in 1984. (Though not by much.) What's more, McGovern's nomination confirmed, in fact and symbolically, the hard Left's takeover of the Democratic Party and the shattering of the New Deal coalition of Southern conservatives, blacks, and working-class whites. The Republican playbook ever since has relied on securing the South while making whatever inroads are possible among blue-collar workers—the “hardhats” of the Nixon era, the Reagan Democrats, and of course Joe the Plumber.

On the other side of the ledger are Democratic “elites” with a small but rad-

ical base of “college-educated suburbanites, blacks, and liberated women, in addition to young people,” in the words of *Why the Democrats Are Blue* author Mark Stricherz. McGovern, a minister's son, a World War II combat veteran—he flew 35 B-24 missions over enemy territory, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross—and scandal-free family man might have seemed an unlikely paladin for hippies and feminists, even if, as George Will notes, he is one of only two major-party presidential nominees to hold a Ph.D. (The other was Woodrow Wilson.) But what drove the countercultural Left to this unprepossessing South Dakotan was his unflinching opposition to the Vietnam War. He voted against sending U.S. troops to Indochina as early as 1963. In 1970, he sponsored an amendment with Republican Mark Hatfield to bring home all U.S. troops from Vietnam within a year. Quoting Edmund Burke—“A conscientious man would be cautious how he dealt in blood”—he told his colleagues the day of the vote:

Every Senator in this chamber is partly responsible for sending 50,000 young Americans to an early grave. This chamber reeks of blood. Every Senator here is partly responsible for that human wreckage at Walter Reed and Bethesda Naval and all across our land—young men without legs, or arms, or genitals, or faces or hopes. ... [W]e are responsible for those young men and their lives and their hopes. And if we do not end this damnable war those young men will some day curse us

for our pitiful willingness to let the Executive carry the burden that the Constitution places on us.

Little more than a year later, he was running for president on a platform of ending the war, slashing the military budget, reforming the tax code, and offering Americans a federally guaranteed annual income. (A bad idea, to be sure—but not so different from Milton Friedman’s “negative income tax,” a notion favored by Nixon.) To conservatives like *National Review* publisher Bill Rusher, “His original foreign policy was essentially a global bug-out, belatedly modified to provide for the all-out defense of Israel.” As McGovern explained, “I don’t like communism, but I don’t think we have any great obligation to save the world from it.”

This was sharp break with the Cold War liberalism of Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson. Yet the McGovern revolution—as it seemed—never remade the Left as thoroughly as the reaction against him reshaped the Right. Famously, the most ardent supporters of Washington Sen. Scoop Jackson, one of McGovern’s many rivals for the 1972 nomination, deserted the party to become the original neoconservatives. McGovern’s victory, Irving Kristol recalled, “sent us ... a message that we were now off the liberal spectrum and that the Democratic party no longer had room for the likes of us.” Kristol and company were anti-Left and anti-peacenik, but they never embraced the old Goldwaterite goals of curbing the welfare state. They supplied the Right with a new intelligentsia, in the process transforming conservatism.

The neoconservatives were chiefs without braves. But the McGovern revolution also gave Republicans a new grassroots base. In ’72, Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Tenn.) described McGovern as the “triple-A candidate—acid,

amnesty, and abortion.” The “culture war” had begun before that. Until McGovern, however, that war had been fought within the Democratic Party—literally, in the case of the bloody clashes between Mayor Daley’s police and New Left protestors at the 1968 Chicago convention. McGovern’s nomination finally made the culture war a partisan issue, which Republican activists such as Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie were quick to capitalize upon. Their efforts to mobilize evangelicals for the culture war gave rise to the modern Religious Right. Weyrich, in fact, inadvertently named what became the most prominent Christian conservative group when he told a Lynchburg-based televangelist, “Out there is what one might call a moral majority.”

Rev. Jerry Falwell liked the ring of that. His Moral Majority was by no means the only grassroots organization Weyrich, Viguerie, and their allies had a hand in creating, however. Another, the National Conservative Political Action Committee, took aim at liberal senators and congressmen from conservative districts. One of the first scalps NCPAC collected in November 1980 was that of George McGovern.

At first, the elite neoconservatives and the grassroots New Right had little in common with one another or with the older Goldwaterite conservatives. Irving Kristol acknowledged as much in a 1995 essay, “America’s ‘Exceptional Conservatism,’” which contrasted the “antisocialist, anti-Communist, antistatist” conservatives of old with the neoconservatives and Religious Right. All were anticommunist, but anticommunism was no longer the binding force that it had been at the height of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s. Anti-McGovernism, however, would do the trick. The politics of sex, drugs, and war—if not exactly acid, amnesty, and abortion—would define the new conservatism.

The Republican establishment was slow to adopt these issues. Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush had no passion for them. Even Ronald Reagan paid more lip service than fealty to the new priorities of the Right: he had come of age with an earlier anticommunist and libertarian brand of conservatism. But in the 1990s, Republicans embraced anti-McGovernism with ardor. Bill Clinton, an unremarkable Southern governor and keen militarist, looked to the 1990s Right like another McGovern. “From a chicken in every pot,” joked right-wing radio talkers, “to a chicken on pot”—a reference to Clinton’s draft-dodging and drug-using. Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich tagged administration officials “countercultural McGoverniks.”

There were McGoverniks aplenty in the Clinton White House, including the president himself, who in his law-school days had campaigned for McGovern in Texas. And the Clintonites were every bit as beholden to the social Left as their critics maintained—as shown by the president’s commitment to abortion rights and early attempt to end the ban on homosexuals serving in the military. Yet the Republicans’ anti-McGovernite rhetoric disguised a retrenchment on the Right: with the influx of neoconservative intellectuals, official conservatism began honoring pre-McGovern liberal Democrats as heroes. In 1956, *National Review* considered Republican Dwight Eisenhower insufficiently conservative to merit endorsement. By 2008, *National Review Online* thought Harry S. Truman a model for George W. Bush—and meant that as a compliment. “Hopeful conservatives keep comparing Bush to Truman,” wrote Fred Schwartz, the magazine’s deputy managing editor.

If modern Democrats—Zell Miller and Joseph Lieberman aside—were countercultural McGoverniks, old liberals like Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John F. Kennedy were now

conservatives. And if this adjustment entailed conservatives making peace with the welfare state and Cold War liberalism, so much the better for right-wing social democrats like Irving Kristol, whose “chosen enemy,” he avowed, “was contemporary [McGovern-style] liberalism, not socialism or statism.” As for the social conservatives who flocked to the GOP, Kristol noted that economics and limited government were not their foremost concerns. They came to the conservative movement innocent of economics and political philosophy—and untutored in foreign policy as well. “Only neoconservatives can really speak to them in the language of moral values,” Kristol insisted.

Throughout the 1990s, McGovern remained a touchstone for the culture war. After 9/11, he again became a symbol in a real war. “The Dems are still the party of George McGovern, and for them it’s still 1968,” Jed Babbin wrote in a 2003 column about the Iraq War. Notably, although McGovern was not the most prominent antiwar Democrat in ’68—that distinction belonged to Minnesota Sen. Eugene McCarthy—Babbin still chose him as the benchmark of the antiwar Left. McCarthy, after all, had fallen short of his party’s nomination and could hardly serve as synecdoche for all Democrats.

For 30 years, Republicans, neoconservatives, and liberal hawks have cultivated the myth of the McGovern Party: weak on defense, ineluctably opposed to Middle American values, the party of peaceniks and perverts. Not only has this narrative distorted the Right by allowing anyone starboard of McGovern to set himself up as a conservative, it has also led Republicans to misunderstand their enemy. Paula and Monica notwithstanding, Bill Clinton was less interested in sex than in NAFTA-style managed trade. And far from being a peacenik, Clinton led the country into military actions in Haiti, Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq,

Kosovo, Serbia, and a plethora of other places. Clinton was no more a McGovern-style left-winger than George W. Bush was a Goldwater-style right-winger.

The Democrats have not nominated a McGovernite since McGovern himself. The senator’s understudy and 1972 campaign manager, Gary Hart, lost the 1984 nomination to Hubert Humphrey’s protégé, Walter Mondale. Left-wingers such as Jerry Brown and Dennis Kucinich have not fared as well in today’s Democratic Party as Eugene McCarthy did in the Johnson-Humphrey party of ’68. Both Jimmy Carter and Michael Dukakis were, by the standards of their party, moderate governors. Even John Kerry, a celebrity of the Vietnam-era antiwar movement, voted for the Iraq War in the Senate and didn’t dare run as a McGovernite in 2004.

Though the party’s social liberals—feminists, abortion supporters, and gay-rights activists—have indeed consolidated their power, they often did so in alliance with the party’s right wing: the pro-business, Southern-accented Democratic Leadership Council. It was a DLC-run party that denied antiabortion Gov. Robert Casey of Pennsylvania a speaking slot at the 1992 Democratic convention. McGovern, on the other hand, was the last Democratic presidential nominee to select a pro-life running mate. (In fact, he chose two: Missouri Sen. Thomas Eagleton, who withdrew from the ticket when his history of psychiatric treatment came to light, and Peace Corps founder Sargent Shriver. McGovern’s own position was that abortion was a matter properly left to the states.) While the social Left worked out a *modus vivendi* with the DLC, the antiwar Left steadily lost out to humanitarian interventionists. Madeleine Albright, not George McGovern, remains the face of the Democratic Party’s foreign policy.

All indications are that this won’t change under Barack Obama, even if his campaign had similarities to McGovern’s.

He ran on an anti-Iraq War platform and inspired hope among many of the same groups that McGovern did. And like the South Dakotan, he had trouble with white working-class voters during the primaries—indeed, both McGovern and Obama won the Democratic nomination with less than a majority of the votes cast in the primaries and caucuses. McGovern received approximately 68,000 fewer votes than Hubert H. Humphrey; Obama, by the widest possible count, received about 176,000 fewer votes than Hillary Clinton. (Appropriately enough, the protracted Democratic nominating battle of 2008 was itself a legacy of electoral reforms McGovern had helped craft.) When John McCain added Miss Middle America—Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin—to his ticket, pundits Left and Right for a time thought Obama’s fate was sealed. The McGovern coalition couldn’t prevail in a rematch against Nixon’s silent majority.

Yet it did. In the intervening decades, the McGovern coalition had grown. And perhaps more importantly, Middle Americans faced with a choice between the semicompetent socialism of the Left and the spectacularly incompetent socialism of the Republican Right split three ways—between McCain, Obama, and staying home. Mideast war, torture, and national bankruptcy turned out to be even less popular than social liberalism.

If Republicans and liberal hawks were correct in calling Obama a new McGovern, they only succeeded in proving how repellent most Americans, including many conservatives, find today’s GOP. The trouble is, instead of the country getting George McGovern—a temperamental conservative, an anti-militarist, and a committed decentralist—we’re getting Barack Obama, who dreams of another New Deal and picked Hillary Clinton as his chief diplomat. Somehow the neoconservatives and liberal interventionists prevailed again. ■

Spending Our Way to Solvency?

IN A DEEPENING RECESSION, what does the reasonable man do?

Seeing friends laid off, he will get rid of all but essential credit cards, dine at home more often, terminate unnecessary trips to the mall, put off buying a new car, give up the idea of borrowing on the vanishing equity in his house. He will begin to save and start paying down debt.

A company that has reached the limits of its credit and is staring at Chapter 11 will batten down the hatches, lay off nonessential workers, cut employee hours, put off expansion plans, cancel year-end bonuses, and try to ride out the storm.

This is the natural behavior of people responsible for others in an economic storm of the magnitude of the category-four hurricane heading our way. Yet to see and hear our government, folks are doing exactly the wrong thing.

For the U.S. government is set to borrow on a colossal scale, unprecedented save in World War II, and take America trillions of dollars deeper in debt to pick up the slack in the economy caused by the rational decisions of individuals and corporations.

The Fed, whose easy-money policy created the housing bubble that has exploded in our faces, is back printing money and shoveling cash into the banks. And though the Bush deficits are said to have been responsible for our troubles, a new Congress and president have advanced a deficits-be-damned, full-spending-ahead policy.

On top of Bush's \$455 billion deficit and hundreds of billions in bailouts for AIG, Bear Stearns, Fannie, Freddie, and Citigroup, Obama is talking up a new stimulus package of \$500 billion to \$1 trillion.

Our governors and mayors—who, facing deficits, had been cutting back—

have now reversed field and are demanding to follow the federal formula.

When Obama arrived at the National Governors Association Conference in Philadelphia, they pounced. Led by Pennsylvania's Ed Rendell, they handed Barack a bill: \$138 billion. The governors want U.S. taxpayers to relieve them of what American families face: the need to cut spending, pay down debt, make sacrifices, take pain, and live within their means.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the mayors have now followed the governors' lead, declaring they have 4,100 projects "ready to go," which they want U.S. taxpayers to fund.

What are these projects? Under the ever-popular rubric "infrastructure," they include roads, bridges, schools, and public buildings. California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger says he has \$28 billion worth "ready to go," which he would like folks in the other 49 states to fund.

Now historically, bridges, highways, roads, and public buildings have been regarded as pork. In the campaign, they were "earmarks"—payoffs for powerful constituents, a form of political corruption that reformers like Obama and John McCain were going to end.

Now, it seems, earmarks are our salvation. Why are governments at every level doing this?

Because government believes that the restoration of economic health requires us to act against our natural instincts in a recession and start buying and financing new homes and cars and get back to the malls, lest this Christmas season become a bummer for retailers.

After all, 70 percent of our gross domestic product is now based on consumption, though Americans in recent years have had a savings rate of zero.

The disconnect between the instincts of average citizens and the policies of government could not be greater. Governments want us to act prodigally, while natural instincts and inclinations are telling us to act conservatively.

Conservatism and capitalism are giving conflicting signals.

Average Americans are behaving as though in rehab, trying to kick a bad habit of spending more than they earn and borrowing more than they can pay back, while the U.S. government is suggesting that what we really need is to return to the auto showrooms and malls and start spending again, only in radically increased dosages.

Beyond the present recession, questions arise as to whether the U.S. model is sustainable. If government spending were the remedy to recession, why, after Bush's deficits, are we in recession? And if the easy money of Ben Bernanke's Fed is the cure for what ails us, how did we get sick when Alan Greenspan's Fed was conducting a never-ending policy of easy money?

How does it stimulate the private economy to pump hundreds of billions of dollars into consumer checking and credit-card accounts, when more and more of what we consume—from computers to cars to clothes—isn't even produced in America anymore?

What do conservatives, few of whom have opposed the Obama plans and fewer of whom have called for repeal of Bush's big-spending social programs, believe is the alternative approach to ending the recession and creating a sustainable economy?

For the economy we have seems to be condemned to an ever-deepening and widening cycle of crises, each brought on by the cure for the previous crisis, which is always the same: more government. ■

Fight of Their Lives

What anti-abortion activists can expect from an Obama administration

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

ABORTION NEVER BECAME a major issue in the 2008 campaign. But Barack Obama's promise of change extends to the modest legal protections pro-lifers have managed to enact on behalf of the unborn. He has pledged to eliminate them.

By next spring, the incoming administration and pro-life activists will be locked in a series of battles over health-care mandates, federal funding of abortion, and the composition of delegations to UN conferences. Pro-lifers believe that everything they have worked for since *Roe* is at risk. In a speech at Catholic University, Cardinal Francis Stafford said that Obama's "extremist anti-life platform ... is aggressive, disruptive and apocalyptic." He summed up the dark mood of his fellow activists: "On November 4, 2008, America suffered a cultural earthquake."

Pro-lifers have reason to be worried. Obama has been an abortion-rights leader throughout his career. As a state senator in 2002, he spoke out against a bill that would have extended legal protections to infants who survive botched abortions in Illinois, saying the measure "was actually designed to overturn *Roe v. Wade*." He helped scuttle the same bill as a committee chairman in 2003. Obama's opposition stands out because that law was modeled on a similar federal "born-alive" bill that received unanimous approval in a 98-0 vote in the U.S. Senate the year before. Early in his primary campaign, Obama promised Planed Parenthood, "The first thing I'd do as president is, is sign the Freedom of Choice Act. That's the first thing I'd do."

According to the National Organization of Women, the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) would "sweep away hundreds of anti-abortion laws and policies." The proposed law states, "A government may not (1) deny or interfere with a woman's right to choose (A) to bear a child; (B) to terminate a pregnancy... (2) discriminate against the exercise of the rights set forth in paragraph (1)." Parental consent laws that exist in 36 states would disappear. "Conscience laws" that protect doctors and hospitals in 47 states would be jeopardized by the discrimination clause. The federal partial-birth abortion ban would be overturned. The Hyde Amendment, which restricts federal funding of abortion, would be abrogated. Essentially, FOCA would undo all the work pro-lifers have done to place legal limits on abortion since *Roe*. Professor Michael New, in a study published with the conservative Heritage Foundation, estimated that FOCA would result in approximately 125,000 more abortions performed annually.

FOCA hasn't been seriously debated since 1993, the last time Democrats held majorities in Congress. Nearly two-thirds of the current members in the Senate have never cast a vote on it. Douglas Johnson, legislative director at National Right to Life, estimates that there are "58 Senators who are for *Roe v. Wade*, but not all of them are for FOCA because it goes so much further than *Roe*."

The fight over FOCA could have serious consequences for healthcare generally. At the meeting of the U.S. Confer-

ence of Catholic Bishops, church leaders promised to close Catholic hospitals—nearly a third of all American hospitals—if FOCA passes. Selling these healthcare institutions to groups that would perform abortions was deemed to be "material cooperation with an intrinsic evil" and ruled out. One bishop, Paul Loverde of Arlington, suggested another tactic for fighting FOCA: civil disobedience. At a diocesan event in December, he told a crowd, "I would say, 'Yeah, I'm not going to close the hospital, you're going to arrest me, go right ahead. You'll have to drag me out. ... we will not perform abortions, and you can go take a flying leap.'"

Fr. Frank Pavone, the national director of Priests for Life, agrees with Bishop Loverde's defiant stand, but doesn't anticipate such a dramatic showdown: "It is certainly possible to defeat FOCA itself and also possible to modify and weaken it by preserving 'freedom of choice' for healthcare workers and institutions who freely choose not to participate in abortions. I expect that we will be able to do this, simply because such respect for religious freedom is so deeply rooted in American thinking."

Even if FOCA is defeated, or modified substantially, Obama may begin implementing pieces of it. For instance, each year the Hyde Amendment must be reauthorized as a rider to the Health and Human Services' budget. Passed in 1976, this requirement that government employees, military personnel, and Medicaid recipients pay for their own abor-

tions was the first major victory for the pro-life movement.

"By even the most conservative estimate, there are more than one million Americans alive today because of the Hyde Amendment," says National Right to Life's Douglas Johnson. Even pro-choice groups admit the effectiveness of the provision. A 2007 NARAL fact sheet cited a study by the pro-choice Guttmacher Institute which shows "Medicaid-eligible women in states that exclude abortion coverage have abortion rates of about half of those women in states that fund abortion care with their own dollars."

Obama's commitment to serve pro-choice interests means that many of his larger agenda items will have abortion-related components. He has pledged that any healthcare reform package he proposes will require employer-provided plans to include coverage of abortion. He has also promised to overturn restrictions on money for fetal stem-cell research. Any last-minute legal protections the outgoing administration tries to grant healthcare providers who oppose abortion will probably be rescinded. Sister Carol Keehan, president of the Catholic Health Association, told the *New York Times* that these regulations were necessary because "we have seen a variety of efforts to force Catholic and other health care providers to perform or refer for abortions and sterilizations."

Obama has unambiguously pledged to appoint pro-*Roe* justices to the Supreme Court. At the same Planned Parenthood event at which he promised to pass FOCA, Obama warned, "With more than one vacancy on the court, we could be looking at a majority hostile to a woman's fundamental right to choose for the first time since *Roe v. Wade* and that is what is at stake in this election." He voted against confirming both John Roberts and Samuel Alito to the high court.

Domestic policy isn't the only concern for pro-lifers under an Obama administration. The Mexico City policy, which requires all nongovernmental organizations that receive federal funding to refrain from promoting abortion services in other countries, will probably be revoked, as it was during the Clinton administration. Rev. Patrick Mahoney, director of the Christian Defense Coalition, told media outlets that this reversal "would greatly increase abortions around the world. It would also create a scenario in which American evangelicals and Catholics would be paying for abortion referrals through their tax dollars."

The appointment of Hillary Clinton as secretary of state has pro-lifers anxious as well. In 1995, it was Clinton who declared at the Fourth World Conference on Women, "women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights," referring to abortion. From her new post, Clinton will be responsible for the delegations to UN conferences. Of particular importance to pro-lifers is the "Cairo plus 15" review of the International Conference on Population and Development, set for next year, and the "Beijing plus 15" conference on the Status of Women in 2010. These conferences produce non-binding resolutions, but the documents are important to activists because they are used by litigators and judges throughout the world as evidence of "new international norms" to which all countries should conform. Anti-abortion laws in Columbia were struck down in this fashion, and international norms were cited to overturn Texas's anti-sodomy laws in *Lawrence v. Texas*.

Austin Ruse, president of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, expects that delegates from the U.S. under an Obama administration "will reinforce the language in favor of repro-

ductive rights in nonbinding documents." He says, "the Bush administration was isolated at the UN. Muslim countries that normally would have sided with the U.S. on abortion issues looked the other way. The unpopularity of the Bush administration stopped certain conferences from happening." Now, with a new administration, "the EU and the UN will have a big powerful new ally for their agenda."

The economic crisis and two wars that Obama inherits may cause him to break his pledge to pass FOCA soon after he is inaugurated. But he has already begun putting tough pro-choicers in positions of influence. He chose as communications director Ellen Moran, the executive director of EMILY's List, a PAC that raises funds for pro-choice female candidates. NARAL's former legal director, Dawn Johnson, works closely with John Podesta on Obama's transition team. Former Sen. Tom Daschle, now preparing to become secretary of health and human services, voted five different times to block pro-life bills passed in the House from reaching the Senate floor. Abortion access may no longer be first on his list, but Obama's record, his campaign promises, and his appointments ensure that it won't be far down the agenda either.

Pavone notes that there has already been a surge of interest in pro-life activism since the election. "There are those pro-life people who have been on the sidelines, perhaps lulled into complacency the last eight years by a sense that 'the pro-life people we elected will do our work for us.' Now they are coming forward by the thousands asking, 'What can I do?'" With UN conferences just over the horizon, a Hyde Amendment that hangs by a thread, and a president committed to overturning all legal limits on abortion, there is plenty to do. ■

Burmese Days

The junta is content to rule over ruin.

By Jim Pittaway

AS THE WHEELS LOCKED DOWN on the final approach to Burma's Yangon Airport, the young Japanese diplomat sitting next to me said; "If you haven't been here since '95, I expect you will see a lot of changes." The cavernous marble and glass terminal building, its corridors echoing with the footsteps of our arriving planeload of people, was new. The smiling, attractive, female immigration and customs officers were quite a change from the scowling, hostile guys I had become familiar with in previous visits, scattered between 1971 and 1995. The Kuwaiti Government Airbus parked at the only other active gate was new, too, but somehow not surprising.

As I stood in the immigration line, I saw, waiting on the other side of the glass, a familiar face. It would be hard to credit, if I hadn't known, that this serene, dignified 70-year-old man had spent more than 15 years in the infamous prisons of longtime Burmese dictator Gen. Ne Win and his successors, the State Law and Order Restoration Council. When I first met him back in 1994, U Ye H'toon, dissident attorney and scion of two of Burma's great families, had just been released from his latest three-year stint as a guest of the regime—lead water provided free of charge for guests of a political persuasion—and he did not look well. Now he appeared to have fully recovered.

Except for the visible damage that the recent cyclone had done to the countryside, I noticed little change as we drove to Ye H'toon's family compound on Inya Lake, where all the Burmese elite,

including the infamous Gen. Ne Win and dissident Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi Aris have their homes—dictator on the north end, anti-dictator at the south. One change I did observe immediately was that the pill-box in Ne Win's backyard with the twin 50-caliber machine guns aimed at U Ye H'toon's front porch had been removed. After the old dictator's death, his son was jailed for corruption, and Ye H'toon, again permitted to practice law, was retained for Ne Win's defense. Familial amity restored, machine guns gone.

In Myanmar now, as in Burma before, politics are personal. This essential feature either escapes or confounds all the principle-driven democracy advocates and interventionists whose relentless pursuit of virtue has contributed so much to the catastrophe that befalls the ordinary humans who actually have to live in this country.

Another thing that had changed was U Ye H'toon's house. The rambling 1920s British colonial bungalow had been replaced by a lovely multi-story villa, worthy of this family and their station. My host explained that his daughter Yuza had built it for them in the late 1990s, when holes in Western-imposed economic sanctions had permitted her to operate a profitable tour business. When the insurance industry was forced out of Myanmar, as sanctions tightened, organized tourism stopped, so only the first floor of the villa is inhabited. There's simply no money—no rich, no poor, just a daily, common struggle to eat and function at the most basic level. In a strange

way, Ne Win's crackpot "Burmese Way to Socialism," abetted by the imposition of economic sanctions in the name of democracy and human rights, has finally yielded a truly classless, albeit anti-utopian, society.

The Trader's Hotel in downtown Yangon is also new, and rather pleasant. Part of the Shangri-La chain, it's a step down from its Bangkok sibling, but it's staffed by the requisite collection of breathtakingly beautiful human beings. It's also the first hotel I've stayed in that offers "Private Party" on its guest services list. With the eye-feast downstairs, I'll bet they get a lot of calls. I mention this because on the puritanical scale, Ne Win's regime ranked somewhere between Taliban Afghanistan and Castro's Cuba, and that had not appeared to change by the mid-1990s. But pariahs run the country, and that's a fair description of those who do business here, the unfortunate corollary being that these are the kinds of people that ordinary Burmese have to deal with.

The food at the Trader's rivals anything offered at Asia's five-star venues. The only thing causing unease was the desperation in the eyes of the staff as they hand you little cards to fill out saying they "went out of their way to be helpful."

The angle of the view from my ninth-floor room was different from the view from the roof of the YMCA where I stayed in 1971, but the vista hasn't much changed. A few shoddy buildings over ten stories tall have been added, but

they already look like the junk that they are made of. Otherwise, it's the same badly stained concrete, rusting tin roofs, and crumbling sidewalks, overlooked by the magnificent and oft photographed Shwe-Dagon Pagoda. The difference is all in the ambiance. On the plane back to Bangkok, I sat next to a fashion designer from Rio who had come to investigate garment production in Myanmar, a very sophisticated and well-travelled lady. "What's wrong with them?" she asked. "I've seen poverty and misery. Even at home, it's unbelievable. But I've never seen people as beaten as here. It's like a zombie movie. I cried every night in my room. What has happened to them? It's the saddest place I've ever seen."

The best explanation I could offer was that the world knows this is a terrible regime and has set out to punish it. This is how decent people react to a man in the neighborhood who habitually beats his wife. The neighbors, the cops, the judges—everybody tries to make him stop. He won't, so they start to mete out punishment. But Myanmar is really more of a hostage than a domestic situation, so all the well-intended threats only agitate and enrage the aggressor. The punishment lands on her. Everything the civilized neighbors do violates the biggest rule of hostage crises: unless you can take him out right now, don't threaten the perp. These people have been beaten by the perp and punished by the wider community for two decades, to the point that their disfigurement blurs out the elements of their demeanors that are recognizably human.

By now, the question of who did this is academic and irrelevant. What matters is do you put a factory there, put some money into the battered wife's hands? She will be grateful to you and do a wonderful job making your clothes. But one day, she may get her hands on a butcher knife, and there will be hell to

pay. The part of her that has been brutalized to the point of mutation may drive rage to drench in blood and consume in fire anything she can, including that factory you cannot insure. Try Indonesia or Vietnam.

What appeared to be disrepair from the ninth floor was, on the ground, a city's entire infrastructure coming undone. Sidewalks caved into the sewers, garbage piled up, once magnificent parks reverted to jungle. Domestic animals had turned feral. They shared the post-apocalyptic cityscape with the diseased, the starving, and the rats. The regime's abdication of services essential to the maintenance of urban civilization is as deliberate as it is conspicuous, and the sense of abandonment and disposability is eerie. As U Ye H'toon explained later, "The army got the message from the 1990 election"—the one that the West insisted must bring to power Suu Kyi, the Burmese born but entirely Anglicized wife of an Oxford don who happened to be in the country during an upheaval in 1988, and whose father was

hate them and, above all, immune to sanctions, threats, or anything else some outsider might dream up as punishment for their abuses. A smart, and predictable, move if you happen to be deeply paranoid and guilty as charged. These are very different thugs from your garden-variety wife beater, as UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon found out after the cyclone.

The storm that devastated Myanmar last spring came at a point when the regime was particularly annoyed at the UN—and not entirely unreasonably so—due to the behavior of the Security Council's appointed mediator between the regime and opposition. After meeting with the junta and agreeing on an agenda, the envoy met with Suu Kyi. No doubt awed by her charisma and rectitude, or perhaps because taking your cues from a Nobel Peace Prize winner is always career-safe for a UN diplomat, he then deplaned in Singapore and publicly excoriated the generals. He called for even more punishment for Myanmar. This demolished any leverage the UN

THE REGIME'S ABDICATION OF SERVICES ESSENTIAL TO THE MAINTENANCE OF URBAN CIVILIZATION IS AS DELIBERATE AS IT IS CONSPICUOUS.

a famous and short-lived leader of post-colonial Burma. He continued, "The army recognized the election results as a rejection of them and the 'Burmese Way to Socialism' and replied to the people, fine, if you think we're going to put in power some Englishwoman who's going to put us in jail, you're crazy, but that's the end of 'socialism.' You ingrates are on your own."

So the regime, by decree, changed the name of the country to Myanmar and moved the capital to some unpronounceable redoubt 200 kilometers north of Yangon where they live in splendid isolation, safe from the people who

may have had and demonstrated how Suu Kyi's inflexibility plays into the hands of the regime, which in turn prolongs the suffering of the Burmese, perhaps beyond endurance.

As a result, when Moon tries to talk to the junta about getting aid to the cyclone victims, they refuse to take his calls. By back channels, they get a message to him that they will receive him in person in Myanmar, to discuss the cyclone crisis only. No talk about human rights or national "reconciliation," no criticism of the regime, and absolutely no nonsense about Professor Aris's widow in her villa on Inya Lake. Having

set the agenda, the three top leaders graciously receive Moon to discuss what might be done.

Visas? Help from experienced international relief workers? Why hasn't anybody suggested this? How embarrassed we are that we didn't think of it ourselves. And so on. Great TV to rip the guts out of the Burmese, seeing the UN secretary general himself groveling to these guys. Moon knows it, but what's a little humiliation when so much death and suffering is at stake? The junta could not be more accommodating: just have those aid workers fill out some forms and hand in their passports at the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok. See, we're not monsters, and we've got you bowing and scraping all over TV to prove it.

So the passports pile up at the visa section in Bangkok. The three guys who handle the paperwork are completely overwhelmed. Soon there are 500 or more just sitting there. All that chemically treated paper lying around "spontaneously combusts," and hundreds of incinerated passports from all over the world need to be replaced. Then in a few months, after we do our repairs and the aid workers get passports reissued, we start over again. Yuck, yuck, yuck. Do you think Ban Ki-moon hates these guys and wants to punish them? He can join the queue.

The only way to get at them is through China, which will never allow a close and resource-rich neighbor to be turned over to some Englishwoman and her legions of Tibet-obsessed, problem-conflating, China-hating troublemakers. And Suu Kyi and her supporters behave exactly to type. "We're here to liberate the Burmese, not to please the Chinese" is a typical response if you suggest a solution for Myanmar that involves engaging neighboring countries. Suu Kyi's grim refusal to recognize, let alone accommodate, Chinese interests is the core of a delusional system that blinds

her to the cruelty of the sanctions on the Burmese, not to mention the international community's utter failure to lay a glove on the junta, two decades on. When it comes to the people in the here-and-now, the actual compassion index, the regime and its critics post what amounts to a draw. Both agree that the people who made the sweatshop lady cry are disposable in service to greater ends: Western democracy on one hand, preservation of power on the other.

It is the great misfortune of the Burmese that in 1988 a spontaneous and long overdue popular uprising against Ne Win happened to coalesce around a political novice whose identity and program made her, from day one, entirely unacceptable to the regional superpower, not to mention the rest of the country's neighbors. Since then, invested with the secular sanctity that goes with a Nobel Peace Prize, Aung San Suu Kyi Aris has proven to be as unyielding and incapable of compromise as Ne Win himself, demonstrating, year after dreadful year of stalemate, that bravery and leadership are not synonyms.

Suu Kyi's 15 minutes of fame have been frozen into two decades of misery because she continues to play the one card the regime—and everyone else in the region—knows China will never accept or allow: unconditional surrender to Western pressure, immediate transition to British-style parliamentary democracy, which, as the neighbors know all too well, didn't work in Burma before. Her program translates as "put yourselves in manacles and order your pilots to deliver you to the Hague where you can be tried by your former colonial masters for crimes against humanity. Oh, and by the way, take your criminal Chinese sponsors with you because we don't approve of them either."

I understand some of Suu's inflexibility. Over a four-year period I had occasion to meet her husband, Dr. Michael Aris, at various conferences and awards

ceremonies. I came to like and admire the guy. I also became increasingly uncomfortable with the loss, grief, fear, and confusion that were clearly killing him. The regime—always in control, always playing the emotional torture game on their pitch and by their rules—caught on to this, too, and allowed him to visit his wife, from time to time. She could have ended the game at any point by getting on a plane with him. But she chose her principles, her duty, and the greatness of her bourgeois martyrdom, and watched him die.

As someone who knew Michael well enough to be invited as his guest in Oslo, I have a hard time getting past that. I imagine that if Suu Kyi ever gave in on anything, doing so would open a pit of regret and self-loathing that would probably be unendurable. She would have to figure out how to forgive herself for Michael, not to mention the two sons she abandoned, and admit her culpability in the misery that surrounds her. That could be far too much to ever expect from an ordinary human, so it's probably impossible to be other than an icon, if you have the option, as she certainly does.

But the endgame is coming. All the Bangkok-based Chalabi wannabees, the widow Aris, even U Ye H'toon think that they will control the inevitable uprising. But I respectfully beg to differ, for two separate but related reasons.

First, the junta may as well have hung a "Property Condemned" sign on the entire city of Yangon and would be happy to see it blown sky high, knowing that U Ye H'toon, Suu Kyi, other troublemakers, and the many foreigners who despise them will be consumed in the conflagration. That would be fun to watch and film. They love to show unedited atrocity porn taken during the 1988 uprising to unsuspecting foreign guests, including Senator and Mrs. McCain. She threw up and then passed out. My money's on them sending the

arsonists in, whenever they're ready and when they have the initiative. It's hard to bet on the other guys.

The other, more disturbing reason is because I watched Sule Pagoda for two hours and nobody came. This matters because this unpretentious stupa in the center of Yangon represents the mythological Mount Meru, around which Theravada Buddhist cosmological order coheres. The ring of shops surrounding its base was empty. No one buying incense, amulets, miniatures of the Buddha, or the other trappings of complex ceremony that ritually maintain spiritual order and keep chaos at bay.

On the contrary, all the myriad and visible signs of the underlying "primitive religious system" that Theravada Buddhism exists to suppress abounded. Engagement with the spirit world, common everywhere in Southeast Asia, has always been particularly visible in Burma. But what I saw was a level of obsession, permeating the consciousness and activities of the people in the streets—written on their faces, as it were, in swirls of rice powder, tattooed on their bodies in ink, worn as charms or amulets, and codified in precise rituals of gesture, art, language, and behavior ever so tightly wound, to ward off the animate evil that they have come to believe defines their age and controls their fate. This apathy has been building for years, but the processes were clearly accelerated by a putative uprising attempted by Buddhist monks who began peaceful demonstrations in the streets of Yangon last year.

At the time, I began receiving overheated calls and e-mails from all over the world inviting me to rejoice in the imminent deliverance of the Burmese by means of the "Saffron Rebellion." "They won't dare shoot the monks!" Burma's well-wishers enthused. I thought the junta would not only dare, but would rather enjoy ordering their village-boy soldiers to do just that, showing every-

one, God included, once and for all who's really boss in Myanmar. Apparently I was right. The monks were gunned down, and then the cyclone hit. It broke the back of the higher religious system that stands between order and chaos in society, but not those thugs who hold a country hostage.

I was younger and a lot smarter when I saw the same thing start to happen in another Theravada Buddhist country in 1972. Of course it's a lot more comforting to think that a cabal of Left Bank intellectuals calling themselves Khmer Rouge, through sheer malevolence of personality and program, turned a peaceful, docile, kindly, and very civilized nation called Cambodia into a

charnel house of homicidal maniacs. The idea that such things might be related to violence, hopelessness, and fear inflicted upon people in unimaginably toxic doses, causing the collapse of belief itself, ushering in the reign of chaos, is almost incomprehensible. It might give people pause when considering whether to interfere in other obscure and mysterious places. Like I told the girl from Rio: just get on your plane to Paris and forget this place entirely, lest you turn into a pillar of salt—or something worse. ■

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Perfect Sowing

Cultivating the American character

By Jeremy Beer

HE TRAVELED the three miles to the mill 63 times during the 87th harvest of his life, his old International pulling the wagon my uncle filled with beans or corn. I don't know why he counted the trips; perhaps it helped pass the time and focus his wavering mind on something other than the pain. He said to my father that he wanted to bring in one last crop. He almost did, clearing the beans but only getting halfway through the corn before he swallowed hard and told my uncle that they had better hire another man. The agony was too much, his back too hunched, his vision too cloudy and constricted. He asked my father to check him into the nursing home. A few days later, he died.

The house he lived in for more than 60 years had been his father-in-law's—

whom he often recalled as a lazy farmer, with an air of gentle reproof. His wife, the last of 14 children, had been born in that house. Her oldest brothers had even gone to school in the neighboring one-room red-brick schoolhouse, which later became an outbuilding to house a tractor and a few implements. The old blackboards are still affixed to the walls, but only longtime local residents know what the building once was.

A few years after my grandmother Betty died, he decided to record for all of his descendants the story of how she had contracted polio. She was pregnant with their fourth child. For five months, he recalled, she lay immobile in the hospital, consigned to an iron lung. The doctors called him in to say goodbye on several occasions, but against all odds she

had survived. After he had been alone for a few years, he could not remember that long-ago crisis without emotion.

He told of this so frequently that, frankly, we wished he would move on. It was not that we tired of hearing his stories. It was just that he had so many others to tell, some of them uproariously funny, and we wanted to be regaled, not depressed. Once he got going, he would string memories together in a peculiar staccato style and rural idiom filled with colorful turns of phrase not often heard anymore. It was wildly entertaining.

But he kept coming back to the polio story, probably because he was trying to come to terms with his gratitude. He was overwhelmed by the grace of a God who had allowed his wife and the mother of his small children—including the one

heavy midday heat to bring lemonade and cookies to the men in the fields. My brother and I wouldn't be working, usually, but would just be hanging out with the men, riding along in the tractor or lolling about in the wagon, waiting with eager anticipation for someone to come by with the combine and dump in a load of wheat or beans or corn.

The story of Grandma's polio always led my grandfather to mention Ruby, the Amish girl who helped the family during Betty's illness and recovery. She had lived in the large Amish community that his farm bordered. Despite his frequent interactions with its members, he always spoke of the Amish as exotic creatures. Considered theologically, historically, or in manner of life, they were not so different from his own Anabaptist denomina-

Palmer House. The trip was truncated because there were cows to milk back home, and dairy farmers hate imposing that duty on others for long.

Yes, his was a local horizon, but he was not incurious. He knew every road and almost every family, respectable or otherwise, in the county, and virtually everyone knew him. Indeed, I am still placed by folks in the area with reference to my status as his grandson. He was one of those individuals by whom others take their bearings, a fixed point in the map of the local mind.

He decided to run for office late in life and served several terms as a county commissioner and councilman. He set a county record, so far as anyone could tell, for amount of blood donated to the Red Cross, giving as often as possible until they finally had to turn him away because of his age. He volunteered at the hospital, and for a couple of decades he drove a school bus, never bothering to let it warm up before picking us up on subzero January mornings. He removed the snow from every neighbor's driveway without being asked. During the worst blizzards he would patrol the road, plowing what he could and pulling strangers out of drifts. He was generous, stubborn, proud, charming.

He was, in short, an unselfconsciously rooted agrarian citizen-leader and republican aristocrat. He never read Jefferson, I am sure, and it is almost as likely that he never voted for a Democrat, but he nevertheless was an almost impossibly pure example of the democratic Jeffersonian ideal. And there were once hundreds of thousands like him, leavening Middle America and making it into an iconic land of friendly homes and warm hearths. I do not mean the pioneers, who were at best ambiguously heroic, always chasing the sunset and leaving behind them dearth and desert; naturally, we honor them and bathe them in romance. No, I mean the sober,

HE NEVER READ JEFFERSON, I AM SURE, AND IT IS ALMOST AS LIKELY THAT HE NEVER VOTED FOR A DEMOCRAT, BUT HE NEVERTHELESS WAS AN ALMOST IMPOSSIBLY PURE EXAMPLE OF THE DEMOCRATIC JEFFERSONIAN IDEAL.

with whom she was pregnant—to live. She was gone, but all those children lived close by, even those who had once made their homes far away. Three lived within walking distance, not that anyone often walked out here in the flat, windswept Indiana countryside. So, too, in the area were innumerable cousins, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and folks of no blood relation who nevertheless could not resist calling him Grandpa Beer. God had been good.

Betty emerged from the polio with a limp and a crippled left arm that was nearly useless. She was not supposed to drive but she did anyway, often taking us to doctor's appointments or picking us up from Little League practice. She was admired throughout the neighborhood for her skill in the kitchen, and I well remember her wading through the

tion, which also shunned television, movies, jewelry, makeup, alcohol, higher education, and worldliness in general. If he had ever thought about that, it didn't seem to matter. His horizon was local, and what might have looked to scholars or outsiders as mere differences of emphasis or minor divergences to him made the Amish quite odd. Yet he was large-minded enough to allow that most of them seemed to be right with their Maker.

He didn't often leave Kosciusko and Elkhart counties. Forays outside the state, at least beyond Illinois or Michigan or Ohio, were rare indeed. He visited my parents when they lived briefly in Phoenix in the late 1960s. With them he visited his other son in Alaska in the late 1990s. And in 1944, he had honeymooned for two or three nights with Betty in Chicago. They had stayed at the

quiet members of the post-pioneer generations, the ones who worked harder to settle America than anyone has before or since, and who have been repaid by our popular culture with mockery and endless recriminations for robbing oh-so-many would-be Sister Carries of the satisfying careers and sex lives they so richly deserved. No matter. They're just about all gone now, and so is he.

By our unofficial family count, a thousand people showed up for the viewing, held over two days just a few hundred yards away from his biggest field. The line extended for hours outside the door of the funeral home on a characteristically raw and blustery late October day. Ruby and her family were there, along with concentric circles of relations, church members, and friends from the community—the vast majority of them still persisting, quietly, on a land that their own German-speaking grandfathers and great-grandfathers once settled with thousands of large families and small farms.

It was joyful to re-enter this little bit of near medieval *gemeinschaft* that somehow has survived into the 21st century. But after we buried him, after the traditional big lunch at the church's fellowship hall, the drive back past his house was filled with evidence of that older world's rapid decay. Nearly all the fences have been ripped out. Barns sag. Menacing semis rather than plodding tractors roar down the road. Litter lies in the ditches. The once settled, prosperous land has been emptied of big families and is continually losing its most able sons and daughters. It is being transformed into a giant meth lab, an agricultural industrial park, a rural slum, a place for losers. Another chapter in the unsettling of America. I am happy that he won't be around to read it. ■

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One important ally is not enthusiastic about the change of administration in Washington.

Turkey's leaders are extremely concerned about the impending Obama presidency, so much so that they have alerted their embassies to prepare their press officers and media contacts to counter possible disturbing developments coming out of Washington. The Turks fear an Armenian genocide resolution, as was nearly passed by Congress in October. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who refers to the "incidents of 1915" to describe the Armenian massacres, spoke directly to the Obama transition team during his recent G-20 visit to Washington, expressing concern that the resolution will be revived in 2009 with presidential support. In a letter to the Armenian National Committee of America in May 2008, Obama reportedly wrote, "I share your view that the United States must recognize the events of 1915 to 1923, carried out by the Ottoman Empire as genocide..." He called the Bush administration's failure to identify it as such "inexcusable." The Turks also believe the increase in Democrats in the House and Senate will probably mean more votes in support of the resolution. While there is little doubt that there was systematic mass killing of Armenians during World War I, good relations with Turkey are far more important than appeasing a domestic lobby with a longstanding grievance about wrongs committed by people long dead and serving a government that no longer exists.



Confidential intelligence assessments relating to Afghanistan are increasingly grim.

The CIA is predicting that the Taliban will have a sustainable presence in 75 percent of the countryside within a year and will effectively control all the access roads into Kabul from the south and east. The Agency believes that President Hamid Karzai will move to cut a deal with the Taliban to save his own extremely unpopular and incompetent administration, though the Taliban will probably make demands that are unacceptable to Karzai's Western backers, including complete amnesty, legalization as a political party, and key cabinet positions. The U.S. will surge as many as 40,000 troops into Afghanistan in the next year as part of a last-ditch effort to stabilize the country, but the increase in manpower will largely be offset by the departure of many European contingents.



Where is Ben-Ami Kadish? The New Jersey resident who was part of the Jonathan Pollard spy network was arrested last April 22 for spying for Israel. He was released that same day on \$300,000 bail and was due to return to court on May 22. But he did not reappear. No one in the media seems interested in the case. The Federal Court for the Southern District of New York website is supposed to include all past and pending court cases, but if you search for Kadish, you come up with nothing. If you call them to find out the status of the case, they promise to call you back but do not do so. The same happens when you call the Department of Justice. Perhaps someone should file a missing person's report.

Philip Giraldi, a former CIA Officer, is a fellow at the American Conservative Defense Alliance.

Arts & Letters

FILM

[Doubt]

Through a Glass Darkly

By Steve Sailer

LIKE A GREAT baseball player's career, Meryl Streep's three decades in the movies can be depicted in a few statistics: 14 Oscar nominations, four children, one husband, zero rehabs. Her new role as Sister Aloysius, the fearsome Mother Superior of a 1964 parochial school in the film version of John Patrick Shanley's drama "Doubt," would seem like the perfect outlet for her theatricality.

After all, it's a charismatic job. When I entered St. Francis de Sales in 1964, all the big kids in the second grade explained that I might not survive being sent to the principal because before Sister Adrian entered the convent she had been a lady professional wrestler.

Unfortunately, Streep's performance never quite harmonizes with Shanley's somber adaptation of his Pulitzer-winning drama about the knuckle-rapping principal's quick conjecture that a likable progressive priest is molesting a 14-year-old altar boy. Streep's hamming up Sister Aloysius as the Wicked Witch of the Bronx sounds entertaining, but she runs out of invention, perhaps due to her deprived upbringing as an affluent Presbyterian.

As a film, "Doubt" is a tidy he-said-she-said play (imagine "Sleuth" with

four characters instead of two) by the Oscar-winning screenwriter of 1987's "Moonstruck."

Philip Seymour Hoffman (an Oscar winner himself for "Capote") plays Father Flynn, the newly arrived priest who is the state-of-the-art Vatican II cleric: progressive, genial, even cool. The priest is particularly solicitous of the feelings of the grade school's first black student, a lonely eighth-grade boy.

Hoffman radiates so much acting technique that he's a bit miscast as the guiltily cringing molester: you keep expecting the expert thespian to turn on his reality distortion field and bluff his way out of the jam his character is in, but he never does.

Sister Aloysius is deeply suspicious of this trendy liberal, so she instructs a kindly novice teacher to be on the lookout for any funny stuff. Young Sister James is portrayed by Hollywood's perpetual ingénue, Amy Adams of the Disney musical "Enchanted." Once again, the casting seems a bit off. If the Mother Superior in "The Sound of Music" could recognize that Julie Andrews wasn't cut out to be a nun, surely the even girlier Amy Adams is a little doubtful?

Setting the play in 1964 allowed Shanley, who was born in the Bronx in 1950, to get the period details right—Sister Aloysius bans all ballpoint pens because pressing too hard ruins penmanship—but undermines a plot that should have been set 20 years later. The institutional crisis in the Catholic church in 1960s was less homosexuality among priests than rampant heterosexuality: the Father Flynn's and Sister Jameses were falling in love, leaving holy orders, and getting married. The admittedly anecdotal evidence suggests that declining numbers of straight priests allowed the gay element

in the clergy to reach a critical mass, enabling what had been a chronic but limited problem to metastasize.

By naming his play "Doubt," Shanley pulled a fast one on the many critics who assume Sister Aloysius is the villainess as quickly as she assumes the worst about Father Flynn.

Programmed to praise doubt and denounce dogma, the pundits salivated on cue when Shanley launched a media campaign to spin his sturdy little play as an attack on religious fundamentalism. In the *New York Times*, for instance, Christopher Isherwood asserted that "Doubt" delivers "a broader commentary on the state of the cultural and political discourse in America, and indeed on the dangerous human tendency to take refuge in certainty..." Surely, though, the church's homosexual molestation scandal is a case of tolerance run amok, just as Father Flynn's guilt is beyond doubt?

Shanley's actual text has a much less hackneyed point to make via the movie's best performance. Viola Davis plays the victim's mother, who, to Sister Aloysius's shock, explains that she is at least relieved that her son's latest admirer is a kind gentleman. After all, she took him out of public school to keep him from getting beaten up by other boys so much.

Shanley himself is struck by the duality he has witnessed in homosexual priests. A child in his extended family was molested, but a similar man "saw something in me, and educated me; gave me a great classical education. But he was a predator, and in my case he did nothing about it, but in other cases he did do something about it." ■

Rated PG-13 for thematic material

BOOKS

[*Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles*, Richard Dowden, Portobello, 550 pages]

The Beautiful and the Damned

By Mary Wakefield

A DECADE AGO, at 3 a.m. on a hot night in a small village a few hours north of Kampala, Uganda, I was woken by the sound of screaming. I sat up in the pitch black, head cocked. All around me, in concrete dormitories, the pupils of Makonze boarding school were sleeping—but it wasn't a child's voice. I listened for a while longer, then identified the noise: the cold, futile shriek of a dying dog. So I got up, full of indignation at the thought of canine suffering, and padded out into the dark.

A few minutes later the shrieks turned to a whimper then collapsed into silence. Out of the night appeared a knot of excited children. "He want chickens, but we got him!" one boy, Anthony, proudly explained. A hungry dog had jumped into the chicken coop, so a gaggle of alert 7-year-olds, led by Anthony, had leapt from their beds and stoned it to death.

The next morning, to my horror, the Makonze teachers congratulated the children. They saw nothing wrong with youngsters enjoying the drawn-out murder of man's best friend. I was incensed and began a strict regime of colonial-style re-education, but to no avail. It took me weeks before I could think of the dog's death without outrage and months before I realized that outrage was best applied to myself and to my wilfully daft attempt to impose British sentimentality on to Africa.

If I'd read Richard Dowden's *Africa* then, I'd have seen sense sooner. The most important lesson, the one that runs

through the collection of linked essays, is this: be patient, don't be too quick to judge. In Africa, nothing is black and white.

Dowden's first experience of Africa was also at a school in Uganda, in the early 1970s, but he learned much quicker than I did. "Here I lost my virginity, physical, spiritual, moral and found Africa's huge patience and humanity—and its cruelty and violence," he says. Dowden was forced to leave a year or so later when Idi Amin decided that all whites were spies, but he made a vow to return—one that he kept.

For the last three decades, Dowden, now head of Britain's Royal African Society, has interviewed dictators, been shot at by rebel militias, and risked his life to report Africa's hidden atrocities, to debunk received wisdom and to write this humane, heartbreaking, and scholarly book.

Dowden says that to see Africa as just a victim is a mistake. Yes, the continent has been exploited by European and American greed, but it gives as good as it gets. His chapter on Angola says it best. During the Cold War, the two great adversaries treated Africa as a chessboard full of expendable pawns. In Angola, the Soviets backed the Marxist MPLA, so America sponsored the Africanist FNLA, with the intention of bleeding the Russkies of money and determination. On one interpretation, Africa was a patsy that paid an appalling price in the lives of Angolan peasants.

But there's another side to the story: "Like many of the small civil wars of the Cold War period that appeared to be ideological, fought by proxies of the Marxist Soviet Union and the capitalist United States, the Angolan war was actually the continuation of a local historical conflict," explains Dowden. "Too powerful allies, both sides cheerfully sang the hymns of the Soviet Union or the US. The superpowers were fooled into believing they had real disciples."

The continent's complexities and its ruthlessness make it hard to help. Dowden's heart bleeds for Africa, but

unlike most of us, he doesn't salve his conscience by writing a check. He investigates and asks: will aid here do more harm than good? Too often, the answer is yes. Time and time again, all over the continent, he finds that foreign aid—food and medical supplies—is used to sponsor militias and prolong conflict.

In the mid-1990s, for instance, Dowden flew to southern Sudan and camped for a few days by Panyagor airstrip. Rumors of an incipient aid drop had snaked through the jungle, so by the time Dowden arrived, the strip was surrounded by desperate, starving families. But in between the huddled groups stalked the soldiers of the SPLA, who also depended on the aid—just as much as they did on guns and ammo—to prolong the war that had starved the people in the first place.

So what's a poor NGO to do? Feed the people and the conflict? Or let women and children die? The aid question has a particular, horrific relevance because of the trouble in the Congo, but Dowden addresses another related and equally current concern. Is there ever a case for Western intervention in Africa? Do we always make things worse? As that 21st-century monster Robert Mugabe incites global fury, there is talk of trying to depose him by force. But that would almost inevitably lead to greater suffering for Zimbabweans.

So what should the international community do? They could do worse than ask Dowden for advice. He explains Mugabe's schizoid personality: "On the one hand he loves cricket and the Queen. ... On the other hand he is an angry African man battling British colonialism and imperialism."

And then there is the other simple fact we find so difficult to understand: Mugabe's hold over other African states. "South Africa was terrified of being seen in the rest of Africa as the cats paw of the West or the bullying boss of the continent," says Dowden. "Besides, Mugabe was a hero of the liberation struggle. When others, such as Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, had wobbled, Mugabe had remained clear and steely."

"Only in recent years have African leaders, largely led by South Africa, begun to become masters of their own ship. They now push back against Western demands and display their dislike of what they see as Western interference in Africa by showing solidarity with Mugabe."

Dowden has no sympathy for Africa's psychopathic "Big Men"—Charles Taylor, Mobutu, Mugabe—whose chief aim is to demonstrate how far they are now from the squalor they were born into. But he is almost equally wary of AFRICOM, the new military command that will co-ordinate U.S. Africa policy.

He has a story that perfectly illustrates his thinking: "I asked an American general how he would feel if China had created a similar structure, putting its Africa policy under military command and Chinese boots on the ground there," says Dowden. "He paused for a moment. 'Uneasy,' he said." Quite.

After 18 chapters of Dowden's adventures, it seems possible that even now, Africa isn't quite ready for direct democracy. By way of explanation, Dowden quotes from Barbara Kingsolver's book *The Poisonwood Bible*:

Party, then in opposition, toured Southern Africa," writes Dowden. "Over Zimbabwe his plane was forced down by bad weather and he landed unannounced at a small airstrip in the bush. Zimbabwean soldiers detained the plane and questioned the visitor. When he proudly announced that he was leader of the opposition in Britain they arrested him. They were thrilled. The soldiers thought they'd caught a really important terrorist."

Am I giving the impression that Dowden despairs of Africa? He doesn't. *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles* is as much love story as political analysis. For example, though Dowden describes the toll taken by Somalia's bloody and ceaseless civil wars, he also celebrates the fierce Somali spirit: "Their poetry reveres bravery and revenge. One of their songs composed during the 1978 war with Ethiopia runs: 'if I don't wash the face of the land with the blood of the enemy, I am not a Somali.'"

Dowden loves Africa despite its savagery, and he persuades his reader to feel the same: to see that its inconceivable cruelty is matched by an equally inconceivable talent for living. At the

lies—thirty-eight people packed on the floor terrified but alive. That in itself is not strange in these troubled times. Refugees and the homeless crowd into the houses of their relatives until they feel safe enough to return home. What is strange is that all the guests in Mr. Nteturuye's house are Hutus but Mr. Nteturuye is a Tutsi."

Africa's heart, Dowden shows us, has never changed. "Beneath the surface of Africa's weak nation states lie old cultures, old societies with a deep sense of spiritual power," he says.

The same is true of the people. For Africans, even Harvard-educated government ministers, reality is a different, deeper place than it is in the secular West, and any U.S. or European politician making decisions about Africa would be foolish not to take this on board. Earlier this year in Liberia, I met a practicing lawyer, an economics graduate and possible future candidate for president, who talked to me about the recent civil war. "One of the troubles was that so many of the warlords had magical powers," he said, then nodded enthusiastically: "Yes, it's true, bullets could not hit them. There are witnesses who saw the bullets swerved around the generals, because they were under the protection of spirits."

I was a little taken aback. It wouldn't have fazed Dowden: "This belief in the spirit world partly explains Africans' lack of political or social agency ... but such beliefs also provide immensely powerful defences against despair and hopelessness. Africa always has hope," he says. "I find more hopelessness in Highbury where I live in north London than in the whole of Africa."

As the Nigerian novelist Ben Okri points out, "the African world of spirits and gods and mystical powers is one in which Homer, Jesus Christ, and Shakespeare would have been far more at home than our modern Western atomised lives." America, of all nations, should appreciate that. ■

Mary Wakefield is deputy editor of the *London Spectator*.

HE PERSUADES HIS READER TO FEEL THE SAME: TO SEE THAT AFRICA'S INCONCEIVABLE CRUELTY IS MATCHED BY AN EQUALLY INCONCEIVABLE TALENT FOR LIVING.

"To the Congolese it seems odd that if one man gets fifty votes and the second forty nine, the first one wins altogether and the second one plumb loses. That means almost half the people will be unhappy and in a village that's left halfway unhappy you haven't heard the end of it. There's sure to be trouble down the line."

Kingsolver's novel is set in pre-independence Congo, but in those few sentences she spells out the story of most of Africa post independence.

And it's comic but telling that the whole concept of a loyal opposition leaves Africans perplexed. "In 1991, Neil Kinnock, the leader of Britain's Labour

height of the civil war in Sierra Leone, Dowden meets women clapping, singing, and pounding yams in the setting sun, their capacity for joy undiminished though their villages burn around them. There is no word for depression in most African languages.

And there is compassion, even in the middle of the worst and most pitiless conflicts. In Burundi, after the first spate of Hutu/Tutsi massacres, Dowden comes across a man he describes as a "brilliant spark of hope." Jean-Baptiste Nteturuye is a retired policeman, "Tall, dignified aristocratic-looking ... he used to be a sub-chief in colonial times. ... His back rooms are filled with Hutu fami-

[*The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008*, Paul Krugman, W.W. Norton, 191 pages]

Krugman's Nanny State

By David Gordon

AT FIRST SIGHT, Paul Krugman appears to have written exactly the book we need. Cries of recession go up everywhere. Nearly every day brings an account of a fallen financial giant or a major industry facing bankruptcy. Lenin's famous question—though not, one hopes, his answer—inevitably arises: what is to be done?

Krugman seems ideally qualified to answer. He is an economic theorist of great distinction, the winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2008. Moreover, unlike the vast majority of his fellow theorists, the popular *New York Times* columnist writes for the public in simple and clear prose. Agree with him or not, you know that Krugman will not try to bamboozle you with jargon.

The Return of Depression Economics begins promisingly. Economists, Krugman tells us, work by constructing models: "The only way to make sense of any complex system, be it global warming or the global economy, is to work with models—simplified representations of that system which you hope help you understand how it works." Accordingly, he endeavors to give readers a simple model to enable us to grasp his prescription for our current disorders: a system devised by a group of parents to establish a babysitting pool.

During the 1970s the Sweeneys were members of ... an association of young couples ... who were willing to baby-sit each other's children. This particular co-op was unusually large, about 150 couples, which meant not only that there were plenty of potential baby-sit-

ters but also that managing the organization ... was not a trivial matter. ... the Capitol Hill co-op dealt with the problem by issuing scrip: coupons entitling the bearer to one hour of baby-sitting. When babies were sat, the baby-sitters would receive the appropriate number of coupons from the baby-sittees.

This sounds foolproof, but an imbalance overthrows the system. In the winter, most parents want to accumulate coupons: that way, they are able to go out in the summer without having to worry about babysitting. In winter, almost everyone wants to babysit, but few people want to go out then. The attempt to accumulate coupons fails.

Fortunately, a simple solution unblocks the impasse: "The supply of coupons was increased. The results were magical: with larger reserves of coupons couples became more willing to go out, making opportunities to babysit more plentiful, making couples even more willing to go out, and so on."

This charming tale, Krugman thinks, helps us to understand economic crises and what to do about them. Just like the babysitters trying to amass coupons, an attempt by everyone to hold money will fail. If the demand to hold money is high enough, a "liquidity trap" ensues. Investment will fall into a tailspin, no matter how low the rate of interest. The government must therefore pump in more money, as John Maynard Keynes prescribed. In the bad old days, benighted economists such as Joseph Schumpeter thought that failing businesses should be allowed to collapse in a depression. Now we know better, writes Krugman: "Before World War II, policymakers, quite simply, had no idea what they were supposed to be doing. Nowadays the whole spectrum of economists, from Milton Friedman leftward, agrees that the Great Depression was brought about by a collapse of effective demand and that the Federal Reserve should have fought the slump with large injections of money."

Krugman's parable of the tiny tots omits an important fact, however. Issuing more coupons did indeed solve his problem, but another answer would have done at least as well. When people found themselves unable to satisfy their demand for coupons, they could have offered to babysit for fewer coupons. They would thus bid up the price of coupons, and the price of baby-sitting would fall. If quantity of a good demanded exceeds supply offered at a given price, elementary economics tells us that the price will need to go up.

Just as before, the application of this solution to economic depressions is obvious. If people are not buying enough, prices need to be lowered to make purchases appealing. True enough, everyone cannot cut costs successfully at the same time. But if some people do lower prices, this will induce others to buy. The free-market economist W.H. Hutt, one of Keynes's foremost critics, showed in detail how this takes place in his *Keynesianism: Retrospect and Prospect*. Resort to increased government spending, as Keynes prescribed, is not necessary.

Krugman is of course aware of this, but he does not get around to mentioning it until about 60 pages after he presents us with the babysitting model: "The answer, as any economist should immediately realize, is to get the price right; to make it clear that points earned in the winter will be devalued if held until the summer. ... This will encourage people to use their baby-sitting hours sooner, and hence create more baby-sitting opportunities."

When he applies this point to the economy, though, Krugman does not mention the price system. Instead, he mounts his hobbyhorse—the need for government intervention: "But what in the baby-sitting economy corresponds to our coupons that melt in the summer? The answer is inflation, which causes the real value of money to melt over time."

Yet why can't people adjust prices by themselves without the heavy hand of government? Krugman is too good an economist to ignore this question. This

time we have to wait for another 100 pages before the explanation. "Briefly, the source of the theoretical disputes [in economics] was this," Krugman writes, "shortfalls of overall demand would cure themselves if only wages and prices fell rapidly in the face of unemployment. In the story of the depressed baby-sitting co-op, one way the situation could have resolved itself would have been for the price of an hour of baby-sitting in terms of coupons to fall ... and the co-op would have returned to 'full employment' *without any action by its management.*" (Italics mine.)

Krugman thinks, however, that in a depression prices and wages would not fall rapidly enough to restore full employment. Austrian economists such as Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, and Murray Rothbard disagree. Yet even if these economists are right, Krugman can still argue his point. Suppose that market price adjustments make Keynesian spending unnecessary. It does not follow that government intervention should be rejected. Why rely on the market when we can more easily "prime the pump"?

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Here we can appeal to Krugman himself, who has been keen to emphasize that if we do not face depression, government spending will cause inflation. In an earlier book, *The Great Unraveling* (2003), he warned of the dangers of deficit spending when the economy is in good condition, rightly excoriating the Bush administration for its massive defense spending. Keynes, he noted, warned of the dangers of inflation as well as the perils of unemployment. The correct balance between too much government spending is, in the Keynesian view, very difficult to achieve. Why, one might then ask, rely on the government at all?

There is a deeper issue at stake here. Even if the government could be relied on to provide the right dose of spending, Krugman's Keynesianism does not answer the most basic question: why does the economy face collapse at all? If, in Krugman's terms, everyone wants to hold money and no one wants to invest, how did we get into this predicament?

Once more we can find the answer in what Krugman tells us, though he does not draw the correct conclusion from his remarks. He explains, "At some point goldsmiths discovered that they could make their sideline as keepers of coin even more profitable by taking some of the coin deposited in their care and lending it out at interest ... on any given day some of the depositors would show up and demand their coin back, but most would not. So it was enough to keep a fraction in reserve; the rest could be put to work. And thus banking was born."

As the Austrian economists have explained, under a centralized banking system, fractional reserves permit the central bank to bring about a massive expansion of credit. This induces investors to start projects that, when the credit expansion ends, collapse. As Krugman points out, bank credit expansion led to investment bubbles in Asia during the 1980s: "Well, it turns out that Japan's investment bubble was only one of several outbreaks of speculative fever

around the world during the 1980s. All of these outbreaks had the common feature that they were financed mainly by bank loans." Yet we face a similar situation in America today, where risky subprime mortgage loans created a bubble in the housing market that has collapsed.

In the Austrian view, the collapse of these malinvestments constitutes the depression. The issue is not a sudden loss of spirit by investors but an adjustment made necessary by unsound financing. In other work, Krugman has raised an objection to this account. Why, he asks, should a liquidation of certain bad investments lead to a general crisis for the economy?

Again, Krugman answers his own question. Today, we have not just fractional reserve banking, but many other credit creators. "The set of institutions and arrangements that act as 'non-bank-banks' are generally referred to as either the 'parallel banking system' or as the 'shadow banking system.'" These institutions have financed so much investment, in the housing market and elsewhere, that a major collapse creates tremendous problems of adjustment.

For Krugman, the remedy is of course more government. The shadow banking system must be placed under strict government supervision and Krugman's "guess is ... that there will eventually have to be more assertion of government control—in effect, it will come closer to a full temporary nationalization of a significant part of the financial system." He makes clear that he does not want a permanent takeover, just a temporary government intrusion to fix the system. But with the American economy spiraling toward greater and greater catastrophe—and government intrusion temporarily unable to reverse the problems—is it not time instead to abandon Keynesian mismanagement and return to sound money, making speculative credit expansion impossible? ■

David Gordon is a senior fellow of the Ludwig von Mises Institute and editor of The Mises Review.

[*The Art of the Public Grovel: Sexual Sin and Public Confession in America*, Susan Wise Bauer, Princeton University Press, 352 pages]

Forgive Me For Getting Caught

By Peter W. Wood

AMERICA'S characteristic scoundrel is the con man. Herman Melville gave us a wonderful anatomy of this vulnerability in his 1857 novel, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*. The steamship *Fidèle* heads down the Mississippi with a cross-section of Americans aboard, many of whom fall victim to a practitioner who entangles them in their own vanities. He is no ordinary con man. He is able to transform himself into a crippled ex-slave, a widower in mourning, a transfer agent for a coal company, a solicitor for an asylum for widowed and orphaned Seminoles, and more. His goal is not limited to fleecing his marks. One character warns, "Money, you think, is the sole motive to pains and hazard, deception and deviltry, in this world. How much money did the devil make by gulling Eve?"

Americans are susceptible to con men because our society depends to an extraordinary degree on establishing trust among strangers. We are a commercial, physically mobile people who have little to rely on in the way of established community order. Most of us live, work, and play among relative strangers. We move into neighborhoods where we know no one; we change jobs and acquire whole new cohorts of colleagues; we join churches where we commit to brotherhood with people we have never before laid eyes on. But the rapidity with which we establish connections to strangers and turn them into acquaintances and then friends comes at a price: it makes us vulnerable to liars, to people who counterfeit good inten-

tions or who, at the extreme, fake their entire identities.

Liars who get exposed and get forgiven, liars who get exposed and don't get forgiven: this is the terrain of Susan Wise Bauer's argumentative new book *The Art of the Public Grovel: Sexual Sin and Public Confession in America*. The subject is a departure for Bauer, who is best known for a history of the ancient world and books aimed at homeschoolers. But there is nothing of the classical virtues, such as stoicism, in *The Art of the Public Grovel*. The tone of this volume, from the title through to the last page, is cynical distaste for America's appetite for public repentance.

Bauer zeroes in on sexual hypocrites: people who pretend to uphold standards but whose lives tell another story. Her gallery consists of Grover Cleveland, Aimee Semple McPherson, Ted Kennedy, Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart, Bill Clinton, and Cardinal Law, with cameo appearances from Jimmy Carter, Ted Haggard, Mark Foley, and David Vitter. A mix of politicians and clergy, people who—unlike, say, Hollywood celebrities—have some stake in being seen as possessing personal rectitude. What happens when they are exposed as fakes?

This is rich material, but Bauer aims to do more than rake through it. She has a thesis: that American society as a whole has absorbed the ethic of public confession that was born in the Protestant Great Awakenings and came to fruition in the popular revivals. Men such as Charles Finney (1792-1875), who popularized the practice of having groaning sinners come to the head of the congregation to confess their sins, and Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), who streamlined the altar call by having congregants come forward to confess "faith" rather than sin, gave America a taste for publicly enacted repentance. Moody's elision of two kinds of confession proved particularly useful. It became possible to "confess" without admitting any particular transgression. If Bauer is right, when Bill Clinton declared, "I have sinned" without ever

mentioning a particular sin, he was drawing on the well of rhetorical ambiguity dug by American evangelicals.

Bauer's argument, however, is more intriguing than it is convincing. To get to Clinton's moral triangulations, she walks us through a series of cases in which people didn't confess and yet succeeded in avoiding serious consequences for their transgressions.

Faced with scandalous accusations in the middle of his 1884 presidential campaign—"Ma, Ma, where's my Pa?"—that he had "seduced a helpless woman, made her pregnant, and then forced her to put the baby in an orphanage," Grover Cleveland improvised a response that, as Bauer sees it, was built on an implied confession to members of the clergy. Cleveland also made clear his willing acceptance of financial responsibility for the child, he avoided tit-for-tat attention to the sexual indiscretions of his Republican rival Sen. James Blaine, and he proceeded in the face of continuing allegation to deny nothing.

His ace, according to Bauer, was a prominent Protestant minister, the Rev. Kinsley Twining, who announced that there had been "no adultery, no breach of promise, no obligation of marriage," and that Cleveland had been "singularly honorable." Decoded, this meant the woman, Maria Halpin, was to be seen as the culpable party. Cleveland manfully shouldered his responsibilities without complaint, making his silence seem heroic. The clergy gave Cleveland cover that he could not have provided for himself.

Bauer recounts the "Ma, Ma, where's my Pa?" scandal seemingly in the hope of spotting an early connection between Protestant notions of confession and how a capable public figure can escape opprobrium for unworthy behavior. But Cleveland's actions seem less a prefiguring of Bill Clinton's maneuvers than a template for Barack Obama's Houdini-like escape from his decades-long involvement with Jeremiah Wright, Bill Ayers, and ACORN. Obama, like Cleveland, made an effective political strategy out of a shrug.

Bauer's argument seems stretched even further in her recounting of the celebrated disappearance and reappearance of the Los Angeles-based Pentecostal evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson in May and June 1926. McPherson appears to have gone on holiday with her (married) radio engineer, Kenneth Ormiston. After several weeks, her mother declared her dead and held memorial services, but McPherson then reappeared with a story about being kidnapped by Mexicans and eventually escaping 20 miles across the desert by

below a bridge on Chappaquiddick Island on the night of July 19, 1969, he too had to overcome some public doubts about his character. But Kennedy persistently offered "explanations," never a "confession." The explanations described the circumstances and included his denials of "immoral conduct," but they never reached the central matter of owning responsibility for his actions. Bauer sees this rather coldly as Kennedy's failure to keep up with the times. "Unlike Cleveland or McPherson, Kennedy faced repeated

Clinton's "confession" contributed to his survival in office, but there were alliances, favors, dependencies, and ultimately votes as well.

Bauer's appraisals of other transgressors are all worth reading. Jimmy Carter maladroitnessly confesses in a 1976 *Playboy* interview, "I have committed adultery in my heart many times." Evangelist Jim Bakker builds a television empire and then is brought down in 1987 by revelations of his affair with a church secretary. A few years later another evangelist, Jimmy Swaggart, weathers a similar scandal by becoming a model of self-abasement and repentance. He has a second fall from grace, however, and is finished. Bernard Cardinal Law of the Boston Archdiocese throws in the towel after a year of stonewalling on why he persistently reassigned pedophile priests to new parishes where they could continue their abuse.

Bauer wraps the book up with glances at Ted Haggard, the evangelical minister who stepped down after revelations that he was a long-term client of a male prostitute; Mark Foley, the Florida congressman who wrote sexual notes to congressional pages and subsequently lost his seat; and Sen. David Vitter of Louisiana, who apologized within hours of learning he had had been identified as a patron of a Washington prostitution ring.

The Art of the Public Grovel doesn't build that strong a case that the confessional rituals of American evangelicalism have come to "translate seamlessly into rituals of American public life." But Bauer's gallery of scoundrels is still worth a lingering visit. And the book includes as an appendix a handy collection of the confessions and apologies of Kennedy, Carter, Bakker, Swaggart, Clinton, and Law. For this alone, I intend to keep my copy on the shelf beside my hardbound edition of *The Confidence-Man*. ■

Peter W. Wood is executive director of the National Association of Scholars and author of *A Bee in the Mouth: Anger in America Now*.

PERHAPS CLINTON'S "CONFESSION" CONTRIBUTED TO HIS SURVIVAL IN OFFICE, BUT THERE WERE ALLIANCES, FAVORS, DEPENDENCIES, AND ULTIMATELY VOTES AS WELL.

herself. Few believed her. The Los Angeles district attorney opened an investigation aimed at charging McPherson with criminal conspiracy. But witnesses recanted, evidence disappeared, and the case collapsed. McPherson eventually became, as Bauer puts it, "more popular than ever."

How? Not by confession. She braved it out with what amounted to a Hillary-esque Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy defense. McPherson depicted herself as the victim of the devil, who had decided that the best way to rid himself of her would be to "puncture the bubble of her reputation." She re-enacted this scene with actors dressed up like demons who climbed out of "painted craters" on the stage of McPherson's Angelus Temple. She played the role of saintly victim and cast the district attorney and other skeptics as agents of this diabolic conspiracy. Bauer concludes, "deprived of the luxury of implied confession, McPherson followed Grover Cleveland's lead and downplayed her personal power, emphasizing her solidarity with the weak and downtrodden."

Ted Kennedy, in Bauer's view, was a victim of changing cultural expectations. When the senator left 28-year-old Mary Jo Kopechne to drown in his car

calls to confess." Bauer seems here to overlook some important distinctions. Cleveland and McPherson's indiscretions were titillating, not fatal, and no one would have been likely to see in their lives a story of ruinous profligacy and carelessness.

A wary-eyed Bill Clinton, hands folded as if in prayer, though his attention clearly on something in the here-and-now, adorns the dust jacket of *The Art of the Public Grovel*. In Bauer's eyes, Clinton exemplifies the power of the adroitly deployed confession. When his lies and evasions came up against the famous blue dress and he needed a new story, "Clinton showed enormous skill in continually adapting his words to a rapidly changing situation." He used Cleveland's resort to a group of sympathetic clergy who could forgive him on behalf of the public. He offered great heaps of contrition for nothing in particular and, as Bauer puts it, brought "powerful rhetorical devices into play."

Her treatment of Clinton, however, is the chief disappointment of *The Art of the Public Grovel*. Bauer all too often seems to admire technique at the expense of substance, and here she becomes dizzy with admiration. Perhaps

The Politics of Same

It seems to me that America's difficulty in facing the country's problems is not that we have the problems, but that we can't face them or won't—that the machinery of

government and means of political change have frozen, congealed, clotted. Solutions are often possible, but movement toward them isn't. The optimistic might see this as a challenge, others as *rigor mortis*.

Consider immigration. Depending on one's politics, various solutions are possible: accept the immigrants and try to assimilate them, stop immigration and send the illegals back, or somewhere between. We do none of these things. There is no policy. Apparently we can't have a policy. We just suck our thumbs and wait to see what will happen.

Education. The schools are terrible, we all know it and have known it for decades, but we can't do anything about it. This isn't a case of not knowing what to do—there is nothing mysterious about teaching children to read—but of being unable to do anything at all. A hardened glue of teachers' unions, political correctness, and racial politics makes change impossible. What we have is not policy but resignation. There is a lot of that going around.

The Armed Forces. We have a huge, backbreaking military unsuited to the wars we fight and with no plausible enemy of the kind it is designed to fight. Yet we can neither shrink it nor change its nature. Too many interests are involved, too many big-ticket contracts, and too many towns dependent on bases. If the oceans dried up tomorrow, we would continue building submarines, perhaps pouring water over them with buckets, because building submarines is what we do. This isn't policy. It is lack of policy.

Taxation. The current system is unreasonable—unwieldy, burdensome, extravagantly complex, cluttered with tailored loopholes. You can barely pay your taxes without a computer, yet the IRS is 20 years behind the real world technologically, and the necessary accountancy is atrocious. Everyone knows this. Yet we cannot do anything about it.

Government in general. Washington consists of agencies accreted over generations, largely unexamined, existing because they have existed and unchangeable because they are too boring to think about. Does anyone know what HUD does? Who the secretary is? Whatever it does, it will continue to do, forever, because that is what it does.

Race. The continued existence of much of the black population in urban slums is the worst domestic problem we have: bad for blacks, for whites, for the economy, for the country. It is grave indeed. Some years back, Detroit was found to have a rate of functional illiteracy of 47 percent. The public schools of Washington are a disaster, little more than holding tanks.

This isn't necessary. Many years ago I wrote a piece for *Harper's* on the Catholic schools of Washington. Over 95 percent black, they were orderly, safe, and full of kids who could most assuredly read. I said so and was attacked by liberals. Catholics were in bad odor among intellectuals, and their success illuminated the failure of the public schools. Result: nothing. As always, what is politically possible won't work, and what will work isn't politically possible. Gridlock.

A contributing factor to this paralysis is that we no longer have political debate. Consider the recent presidential election. It was virtually free of content, being instead a popularity contest among candidates who all thought the same things. Matters that people care about, whether for or against, were seldom mentioned: the wars, abortion, affirmative action, race, the schools, gun control, national healthcare. It was the Moose Huntress versus the First Black President.

Weary of Bush, we had a choice of Bush or Bush, and we chose Bush. The country is run by a particular class of people of similar interests, with a few who want to be in that class and are quickly absorbed by it. They call themselves Republicans or Democrats as a matter of convenience, but the Bushes and Kerrys and Clintons have more in common with each other than with the country they dominate. One-party rule promotes static policy.

The Soviet Union suffered mightily from centralized rule, guaranteed to produce inflexibility. I suggest that the United States moves toward the reality of centralized rule without the appearance. Identical parties from the same class, news media owned by people of the same class, and no means of protest by the public.

An interesting question is whether governments do not inevitably harden into locked relations of power, into habits of behavior that cannot adapt to changing conditions. Much suggests so. For example, how is it that the American carmakers, enjoying an enormous domestic market, totter on the brink of extinction? Sclerosis, plain and simple.

How many bananas does it take to make a banana republic? ■

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